

# FREDERICK OZANAM

H. L. HUGHES

Nihil Obstat

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*Censor deputatus*

Imprimatur

✠ JOSEPH BUTT

*Vicarius Generalis*

*Westmonasterii, die 20th Aprilis, 1933.*



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BY

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B. HERDER BOOK COMPANY

15 & 17 SOUTH BROADWAY, ST. LOUIS, MO.

[PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN]

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	9
<i>Part I—Early Years</i>	
I. CHRISTIAN CURRENTS AND PAGAN COUNTER-CURRENTS . . . . .	17
II. HOME INFLUENCES . . . . .	25
III. A YOUTHFUL APOSTLE OF CHRISTI- ANITY . . . . .	31
IV. DISCOVERY OF HIS VOCATION . . . . .	42
<i>Part II—The St. Vincent de Paul Society</i>	
V. A GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED . . . . .	49
VI. THE SPIRIT OF THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY . . . . .	56
VII. INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL . . . . .	61
<i>Part III—Manhood</i>	
VIII. ON THE THRESHOLD OF LIFE . . . . .	69
IX. MARRIAGE . . . . .	77
X. OZANAM'S DEBT TO ITALY . . . . .	81

# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
XI. OZANAM IN 1848 . . . . .	86
XII. THE EVENING OF HIS DAYS. . . . .	92
XIII. DEATH . . . . .	100
<i>Part IV—The Savant</i>	
XIV. OZANAM AS AN HISTORIAN . . . . .	105
XV. OZANAM AND MANZONI. . . . .	114
XVI. OZANAM AND TONIOLO . . . . .	118
XVII. OZANAM AND ST. FRANCIS . . . . .	127
XVIII. OZANAM AND DANTE . . . . .	131
XIX. OZANAM A LEADER OF CATHOLIC ACTION . . . . .	140
<i>Part V—Influence of Ozanam</i>	
XX. CHARACTER OF OZANAM . . . . .	147
XXI. OBJECTS AND AIMS OF THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY . . . . .	156
XXII. THE LIGHT OF HIS EXAMPLE . . . . .	169
CONCLUSION. . . . .	177
CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE. . . . .	190

## INTRODUCTION

### PRACTICE BETTER THAN PRECEPT

**E**XACTLY one hundred years ago a group of enthusiastic French undergraduates attending lectures at the Sorbonne opened a debating club in Paris with the object of awakening in other students an interest in religious issues. Its doors were flung wide open to members of every creed. One morning their leader, Frederick Ozanam, was waxing eloquent on the subject of the advantages reaped by civilization at different periods of history from the influence of Christianity.

Suddenly he was interrupted. "Ozanam," cried a voice, "you are right when you speak of the past ; in past centuries Christianity has done wonders. But what is it doing for mankind now ? And you too, who pride yourself so much on being a Catholic, what are you doing for the poor ? Where are those tangible results which alone will teach us the practical value of your faith ? We await them, for it is through *them* that we shall be converted."

This trenchant criticism struck a chord somewhere deep down in the heart of that nineteen-

year-old French student. It brought home to him the fact that argument by itself, even when supported by a thorough knowledge of the subject and delivered in a tone of passionate conviction, is not enough to prove to others the truth of Christianity. He was forced to admit to himself that after all perhaps St. Vincent de Paul had brought back more wandering sheep to the fold than Bossuet.

At a subsequent meeting a few days later another student, after lauding to the skies the scepticism of Byron and Voltaire, emptied the vials of his youthful wrath in torrents of abuse against the Church and Christianity.

Ozanam took up the challenge. He spoke as he alone could do when his most cherished ideals were called into question. Later, as he was leaving that roomful of hot-headed, excited students, he said to two of his friends: "*Allons aux pauvres*" ("Let us go to the poor"). "It would be better," he added, "if we Catholic young men, instead of wasting breath on these vapid discussions, were to form a society of our own and concentrate our energies on relieving the troubles of the poor. We shall reap a greater spiritual benefit ourselves and shall also be able to show unbelievers the practical value of Christianity in the world to-day." It was from these very humble beginnings that the St. Vincent de Paul Society, as we know it to-day, first sprang.



The new society held its first meeting in the Rue St. Sulpice, in the offices of a Catholic newspaper. The editor not only took a paternal interest in these eager young men, but kindly consented to sit in the chair. After discussing various types of charitable organizations they decided to find out for themselves the real needs of the ailing and poverty stricken and the best means of helping them by undertaking house to house visiting.

"If you wish to do any lasting good both to the poor and to yourselves," advised their president, "do not be content simply to give alms, but endeavour by a sympathetic understanding of the difficulties of the poor to help them to become better Christians."

The story of Frederick Ozanam, the founder of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, will be told in the following pages. At the first meeting of the society in May, 1833, eight persons were present. Twenty years later Ozanam, speaking in fluent Italian, was able to tell the members of the newly-constituted Conference in Florence: "To-day, in Paris alone, there are two thousand brothers of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. . . . In France fifty Conferences exist, and we have others in England, Spain, Belgium, America—even in Jerusalem." He died a few months after pronouncing these words. Since that date the organization has grown with astonishing rapidity, as the statistics given at the end of this volume show.

How many, though, of those who know that Frederick Ozanam was the founder of the St. Vincent de Paul Society ever realize that this was but one small incident in the varied career of this great champion of Catholicity in nineteenth-century France? The purpose of the following pages is to tell the whole story of this very remarkable man.

In an age when incredulity was fashionable amongst the intelligentsia, and spiritual values were treated with scant consideration by the moneyed and commercial classes, Ozanam—as a layman and a University professor—was able to exercise an uncommon influence for good on those around him.

The great Dominican preacher, Lacordaire, spoke of his death as one which had elicited more widespread expressions of sympathy and regret from every quarter than any he had ever known. A French Protestant, the statesman and historian Guizot, referred to him at a sitting of the French Academy as “a man of letters of the first rank, a sincere and humble Christian, a true friend of Science and a doughty champion of Faith.” Distinguished French writers, such as Chateaubriand and Lamartine, considered themselves honoured by his friendship.

The present Archbishop of Genoa, Cardinal Minoretti—alluding to a lay apostle of Christianity of a very similar type in recent years, Contardo Ferrini, whom we shall have occasion to mention

more than once in the course of this short biographical sketch—once said: “God lights many a beacon to guide into safe harbours mariners in danger of shipwreck on the tempestuous ocean of life. One of these spiritual lighthouses—and not one of those that burn least brightly—is Contardo Ferrini.”

How true these words ring if applied to Ozanam also! To gain a just appreciation, though, of the immense value of this great “spiritual lighthouse” we must first consult the chart of those dangerous seas swept by its moving beams of light, and realize, too, something of the force of the seething waves of doubt and incredulity that lashed against the headland on which it was built. In other words, we must know something about the times in which Frederick Ozanam lived.

PART I  
EARLY YEARS

## CHAPTER I

### CHRISTIAN CURRENTS AND PAGAN COUNTER-CURRENTS

A PORTRAIT painter has to consider not only the best pose in which to place his model, or the lighting of his studio, but to choose also the background best calculated to throw into relief the figure on his canvas.

So likewise, before entering into the details of the Life of Ozanam, we must place this life in its proper historical setting.

Frederick Ozanam was born in Milan, the capital of Lombardy—a city justly proud of its fine religious traditions dating back to the distant days of St. Charles Borromeo, and even earlier to those of the great St. Ambrose. Milan to-day is a great commercial city, the throbbing centre of modern Italian industrialism. In 1813, when Ozanam was born there, Milan was under French rule. Lombardy and Venetia were governed by a French Viceroy, Eugène Beauharnais. The neighbouring province of Piedmont had been annexed outright to France.

This explains the presence in Milan of Ozanam's father, an ex-soldier of the French army who had seen service under Napoleon in Italy and had since become a doctor. By a strange coincidence he took his baby boy to be christened to the church of St. Charles Borromeo—in what is now the Corso Vittorio Emanuele—at the very same font at which forty-six years later Contardo Ferrini, whom we have already mentioned, was baptized.

Those were indeed times of stress for the Church in Italy. Father Lanteri, the great forerunner of Catholic Action, as we know it now in Italy, had just been exiled by Napoleon to a lonely farmstead in a country district some miles outside Turin. He was accused by the imperial police of having attempted to enter into communication with the Pope, Pius VII, then kept under close guard as a political prisoner at Savona, not far from Genoa. It was a period, though, not so much of darkness as of twilight—a twilight which preceded a radiant dawn. A veritable "Second Spring" of untiring zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of souls was to burst out soon after, particularly in Piedmont.

Ozanam was still an infant in arms when Don Bosco, who collected the waifs and strays off the streets of Turin and founded the world-wide Salesian Order, was born in a tiny hamlet near the market town of Asti. His contemporary, Don Cafasso, who did such remarkable work amongst

the common criminals, herded together like animals at that time in the prisons of Turin, was still a two-year-old. Whilst Cottolengo, who created the celebrated hospice for outcasts and derelicts in Turin which bears his name, had scarcely as yet been raised to the priesthood.

George III, a pathetic figure, still sat nominally at least on the throne of England—in practice his place was taken by the Prince Regent. Napoleon was still the dominating personality in the politics of Europe. But the foundations of his throne were beginning to give way. The retreat from Moscow had already taken place. The disappearance of Napoleon from the scene of European politics coincided with the return of the Ozanam family to France. In 1816 they were compelled by the return of the Austrians to Lombardy to move to Lyons.

Although a native of Italy, Frederick Ozanam grew up as a boy in France—at Lyons, the centre of the French textile industry, a city of many bridges owing to the mingling together of the waters of two great rivers, the Rhône and the Saône, just outside the town.

The France of his boyhood was no longer that of the Emperor Napoleon, but of Louis XVIII—"Louis des huitres," or of the oysters as he was contemptuously dubbed on account of his gluttony by his political opponents. In 1824 Louis XVIII was succeeded by the Comte d'Artois, the only

surviving brother of the unfortunate Louis XVI who had perished under the knife of the guillotine.

The new sovereign was crowned with great pomp and solemnity at Rheims as Charles X, King of France by divine right. Ozanam was exactly seventeen when the July Revolution drove the King of France by divine right into exile and placed in his stead a King of the French by the will of the people, Louis Philippe.

A year later an unknown student from Lyons knocked at the door of a scientist of European fame, at No. 19 Rue des Fossés St. Victorin, Paris. Ampère—from whom the ampere, the unit of strength of an electrical current, takes its name—was then past middle age. He received Ozanam kindly, and since his own son at that time was away from Paris studying abroad offered to take him into his own house as a lodger. Who can tell what a lesson it must have been to the quick-witted lad, who had just come up to study at the University, to behold in the dimly-lit interior of the neighbouring parish church the head of that renowned physicist and mathematician humbly bent in prayer before the Blessed Sacrament?

The simplest way to understand the religious situation in France when Ozanam first came to Paris is to recall for an instant what had been the position of the Church—say in 1800.

At the opening of the nineteenth century the Church had practically ceased to exist in France.



The entire hierarchy was gone, the great religious houses had been closed down, the monks and nuns banded to death. A few scattered remnants of the secular clergy still on French soil were leading a precarious wandering existence in the wooded glens of Brittany, or on the moorlands of the Vendée. Large numbers of ecclesiastics from the north of France, who had managed to escape across the Channel during the Terror, had found a temporary refuge in the old-fashioned Protestant England of those days.

One Sunday morning—on April 18th, 1802—the great bell of Notre-Dame, which had remained tongue-tied and inarticulate for ten long years, rang out the joyous Easter message once again to the citizens of Paris. Its single note was re-echoed and multiplied a hundredfold by the pealing of bells from church towers all over the city. In the famous cathedral—which in the days of Robespierre had witnessed the enthronement of the Goddess of Reason—a solemn *Te Deum* was sung in thanksgiving for the Concordat signed between Napoleon and Pius VII. It was the tocsin calling once more on the sons and daughters of the Church in France to rally round her standard. The religious revival which it announced had been heralded by the publication a few days previously of a famous work of Christian apologetics, the "*Génie du Christianisme*" of Chateaubriand.

If the Church was raised up once more out of the

dust it was by the hand, though, of an imperial despot who intended to make use of her as an instrument of government.

The fall of Napoleon and the return of the Bourbons strengthened the links in the chains already forged which bound the altar to the throne, thus wrongly identifying the Catholic religion in the eyes of most Frenchmen with a political party, that of the believers in absolutism as opposed to the new liberties which had been gained at the cost of so much bloodshed at the end of the eighteenth century. Under the Bourbons also the two cancers which had absorbed the life blood of the French Church during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Jansenism and Gallicanism, began to appear once more in a mitigated form. The following lines, said to have been sung in French country churches by the congregation, express pretty accurately this old-fashioned notion of a necessary connection between Church and King :

“Vive la France, vive le Roi,  
La France veut toujours les Bourbons et  
la Foi.” \*

The July Revolution, which overturned the throne of the Legitimist Charles X, brought matters to a head. Was the cause of religion in France to

\* “ Long live France, long live the King.  
France wishes always to keep the Bourbons and the Faith.”

be for ever identified with the Bourbon dynasty ? No ! This was the answer given by a group of young Frenchmen, with some of whom Ozanam himself was later associated. In 1830 Montalembert, Lacordaire and Lammenais started a paper in Paris, the *Avenir*, in which they advocated the complete independence of the Church from State control. The celebrated slogan, "A free Church in a free State," which Cavour was to make use of a generation later with small intention of ever carrying it out, was coined by Montalembert. To obviate any misunderstanding it should be borne in mind that Montalembert did not by any means propose the severance of all connection between Church and State as a Catholic ideal, but simply as the most opportune thing at that moment for France.

The duel between those Catholics who were ready to accept all that was best in the new state of society created by the great upheaval at the end of the eighteenth century and those who, having little or no sympathy with the French Revolution, considered that the safety of the Church could best be served by a close alliance with the throne, continued throughout the reign of Louis Philippe. It was fought out between Montalembert on the one side and Louis Veuillot on the other. The champions of the throne rashly trusted later to the fair promises of Napoleon III and paid the penalty in 1870. The old mentality

has come up to the surface again in our own days in a curiously twisted neo-pagan form, in a movement which H.H. Pius XI has seen fit to condemn, namely the "Action Française."

## CHAPTER II

### HOME INFLUENCES

**F**REDERICK OZANAM'S parents understood the Christian idea of charity and almsgiving very clearly and endeavoured to carry it out in their own lives as far as their means would allow. Christ's words, "inasmuch as you have done this unto the least of My brethren you have done it unto Me," rang ever in their ears.

In their declining years the doctor and his wife began to find it was too fatiguing to climb the steep stairs of the old houses in Lyons. And so they made up their minds when visiting poverty-stricken families that they would try never to go higher than the third floor of a tenement building. The resolution was made, but not carried out. One day Dr. Ozanam was told by one of his patients that in the same building, up on the sixth floor, a poor woman was dying of want and hunger. Cautiously the old man mounted the stairs, making an inward resolution to say nothing about it afterwards when he got home. He reached the landing and turned the handle of the door. There lay the

poor dying woman. But she was not alone! Bending kindly over her was the figure of his wife.

With such examples in his own home small wonder that their son Frederick when he grew up should have developed on the same lines.

Frederick Ozanam has left the following pen-portrait of his father: "My father's manhood was passed in times of wars and revolutions and yet, notwithstanding moments of misfortune, his faith in God never grew dim, nor did his character ever lose anything of its uprightness. He cherished a high ideal of justice and felt a boundless spirit of charity for the poor. Fond of acquiring scientific knowledge, genuinely interested in art and all kinds of work, he was able to infuse into his children something of his own enthusiasm for everything that is uplifting and beautiful."

His mother, Marie Nantas, had seen something of the horrors of the siege and civil war in Lyons in 1793. A cultivated, kind-hearted woman, she worked hard to keep the wolf from the door, and continued to do so when easier times came so as to be able to help others less comfortably off than herself.

Frederick had an elder sister Elisa to whom he was much attached and who exercised a wholesome influence over him during his childhood. She died while he was still a boy. His elder brother Alphonse eventually became a priest and his younger brother Charles a doctor.

One of the most valuable sources of information, from which all Frederick Ozanam's biographers have drawn largely, is the short account of his life and work written after his death by his brother Alphonse. From the following extract we can catch a glimpse of the boy's nature at this early stage: "Frederick was certainly an irritable child, self-willed, extremely sensitive and impressionable. But he was most gentle in his treatment of other children, full of pity for their sufferings, as pure as an angel, absolutely sincere, naturally avoiding evil and fired with enthusiasm by anything good."

While a schoolboy at Lyons Frederick Ozanam, at the age of fifteen or sixteen, passed through that painful phase of religious doubt which in many youths takes place a year or two later. He has described his feelings at that time in the following letter to a friend written in 1830:

"By dint of hearing people continually talking about unbelief and unbelievers I began to ask myself why it was that I believed at all. I began to doubt, although I wished to believe. Putting aside my doubts, I eagerly read all books written in defence of religion, but they none of them completely satisfied me. For a month or two I believed on the authority of some piece of reasoning, then a fresh objection would rise up in my mind and I would begin to doubt again. Oh, how I suffered! My faith lacked all solid foundation and yet I preferred to believe without reason

rather than doubt. But this was too great a torture. I entered the philosophy class. The thesis on certainty upset me. For an instant I fancied that I should be obliged to doubt even of my own existence."

In 1851, two years before his death, Frederick Ozanam wrote the following words in the introduction to his greatest work, "The History of Civilization during the Vth Century":

"In a sceptical age God granted me the grace of being born within the faith. As a child He placed me on the knees of a Christian father and a saintly mother. As my first teacher He gave me a sister as intelligent and good as the angels. . . . Later, however, noises from a world that knew no faith reached even me. I experienced the full terror of those doubts which gnaw at the heart during the daytime and are found at night on the pillow damp with tears. The uncertainty of my eternal fate gave me no rest. I clutched desperately at the sacred dogmas and seemed to feel them crumbling in my hands. It was then that a philosopher priest saved me. He put order and light into my thoughts. After that I believed with a reassured faith. Sensible of my rare good fortune, I then promised God to dedicate my whole life to the service of those truths which had given me peace."

The priest whom God placed in his path was the Abbé Noïrot, the master of philosophy at his school,



a man whom Cousin was accustomed to call "the finest teacher of philosophy in the whole of France," and Ampère, "the Christian Socrates."

Young Ozanam soon became one of his master's favourite pupils. Often the two would go for a stroll together along the unfrequented country roads on the hills encircling the city. They would discuss together the harmony which must of necessity exist between the truths of faith and the findings of science. Certainly they must have talked about the great Christian thinkers, such as St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas and St. Bonaventure, and deplored the empire exercised later over human thought by Descartes, Spinoza and Kant. In the silence of the open countryside the master would encourage the boy to unburden himself of all his doubts and worries, point out the fallacies in his arguments, and then patiently help him to build up his faith in Christianity on a granite foundation of strict reasoning over the fundamentals of all religious belief.

At sixteen years of age Ozanam was already safely planted on the right bank of the river of doubt.

Having known what it means to feel the full weight of the current of doubt, Ozanam was always careful to avoid whenever possible wounding the feelings of those who had never been able to ford their way successfully through the stream. "I am sometimes accused," he wrote, "of exces-

sive gentleness towards those who have the misfortune to be unbelievers. When, as I have, one has passed through the tortures of doubt, one feels that it would be both cruel and ungrateful to be over severe with those to whom God has not yet granted the priceless gift of faith."

## CHAPTER III

### A YOUTHFUL APOSTLE OF CHRISTIANITY

ON Sunday morning, March 8th, 1835, a large crowd surged into Notre-Dame, in Paris, quickly filling the spacious nave of the cathedral. On the following Sundays the concourse of people of every type was even greater. Raw students from the Latin Quarter were seen next to well-groomed and highly-placed State officials; bluff soldiers jostled shoulders with men of learning; great ladies took their seats beside servant girls and shop assistants. They were all drawn there by the brilliant eloquence of the greatest French preacher of the century—Lacordaire. Beneath the pulpit might have been seen sitting quietly every Sunday a young man whose eyes literally shone with joy. It was Frederick Ozanam, who was jotting down the notes on the sermon which he sent in every week to the Catholic paper, the *Univers*.

A few years before, when Father Noirot had reached out to him a steadying hand in the crisis of religious doubt through which he passed, Ozanam

had made a solemn promise to devote his whole life to the defence of the intellectual positions of Catholic thought. Now from the pulpit of the most famous basilica in France he beheld a beacon of light casting its rays over the intellectual life of the capital. Ozanam had good reason to feel content, for the initiative was in large measure due to his personal efforts.

To understand the important part he played in arranging the first course of those famous Lenten sermons—begun by Lacordaire and continued in succeeding years by the most celebrated pulpit orators in France, Ravignan, Félix, Monsabré and others—we must go back, though, to the time when Ozanam first entered the Sorbonne as a university student.

Ozanam matriculated at the Sorbonne as a law student when he was about nineteen. At the University of Paris, as in most other continental universities, college life as it exists at Oxford and Cambridge is practically unknown. Students live, usually as cheaply as possible, in lodgings and simply attend lectures at the various buildings scattered over different parts of the city which comprise the University. Ozanam, as has already been said, had the exceptional good fortune to find a home in Paris in the house of a great scholar, Professor Ampère.

A genuine bond of friendship was soon formed between these two men belonging to quite different

generations. The eminent scientist would invite the young student into his study and talk to him about the research work on which he was engaged. He would explain to him how the marvels of the created universe filled him with an ever-increasing sense of awe and wonder at the thought of their Creator. Sometimes, pressing his wide forehead between his hands, the old man would exclaim: "How unfathomable is the greatness of God, Ozanam, and how limited is our own scientific knowledge!"

To appreciate Ozanam's position as a young man in Paris one must realize the spirit of the age in France at that time. Lacordaire writes as follows:

"A terrible battle had been fought against religion in the name of Liberty. This was barely over when Ozanam first went to Paris. The politicians opposed to the Bourbon restoration had made use of everything they could lay their hands on to turn into weapons to use against Christianity—the Press, the platform, the lecture hall, poetry. By a most grievous misfortune whilst this tempest was raging no voice had been heard amongst those on the side of the People speaking in favour of Christ. Not that the Church in France had no orators, nor writers. But they all belonged to the opposite school of political thought to that which had captured the hearts of the mass of Frenchmen. And thus the voices of De Bonald, De Maistre and

the Abbé Lammenais, when they reached the ears of the multitude, sounded like a faint and dying echo from a past age which was destined never to return."

Béranger, the revolutionary song writer, who was frequently imprisoned by the Legitimist Government of Charles X, has expressed the ideas fermenting in the minds of the Republicans of those far-off days :

" . . . Hommes vous êtes frères,  
Comme ses rois le pauvre est immortel.  
Sciences, lois, arts, commerce, industrie—  
Tout naît pour tous ; les flots sont maîtrisés :  
La presse abat les murs de la patrie,  
Et Dieu nous dit : 'Peuples, fraternisez !'

Des nations aujourd'hui la première,  
France, ouvre-leur un plus large destin.  
Pour éveiller le monde à ta lumière,  
Dieu ta dit : 'Brille, étoile du matin.' "

"Men, you are brothers. Like their kings, the poor too are immortal. Science, law, art, commerce, industry—everything exists for all. The seas are mastered. The Press breaks national boundaries and God says to us: 'Peoples, fraternize!' France, to-day the leading nation, open out for them a wider future. That thou mightest awaken the world with thy light, God bade thee: 'Shine, morning star!'"

In the popular imagination the altar and the throne—the Legitimist throne, that is, of Charles X—were still too closely identified. In point of fact the Government of Charles X had been guilty of attempting to revive amongst the French clergy something of the old Gallican spirit of independence of the papacy. Nevertheless there seemed a danger, when the Bourbons were finally overthrown in 1830, of the Church being dragged down in their fall.

Feeling ran high against the "clericals" in the early years of the reign of the new monarch, the "bourgeois" King of the French, Louis Philippe. Ozanam was soon to discover this in the lecture halls of the University of Paris.

Ozanam's first friendships at the University, as might have been expected, were formed chiefly amongst those young men who had come up to Paris from Lyons. Like everybody else, he was naturally drawn to those whose views were similar to his own.

This little group of kindred spirits soon found themselves in contact with teaching diametrically opposed to Christian doctrine. Ozanam must have been attending lectures at the Sorbonne for about four months when he decided to organize a defensive campaign of resistance amongst the students. In a letter to a friend in Lyons he gives the following description of this enterprise :

"Our ranks have swelled. There are now several others eager to join us in this important duty.

Every time a professor raises his voice against Divine Revelation a number of Catholics are ready to reply. Several of us have joined forces for this purpose. I have taken part twice already in incidents of this nature, handing in my objections to these gentry in writing. Our replies, read aloud in the lecture hall, produced a most salutary effect on the professor, who has practically retracted what he had said, and above all on the other students, who applauded us. It is of vital importance that the rising student generation should be shown that it is possible to be a Catholic and at the same time to have plenty of common sense, and that it is quite possible to love both religion and liberty."

The resistance of this small band of Catholic students was directed in particular against the attacks on revealed religion made by the teacher of the History of Philosophy at the Sorbonne, Professor Jouffroy. A disciple of Cousin and a great admirer of the Scottish philosophers, Dugald Stewart and Reid, Jouffroy had first come to the capital from his native village in the Jura mountains some fifteen years before. Like Ozanam, he had come from a good-living Christian family. Unlike Ozanam, however, he lost all religious faith as a young man in Paris. The following passage, in which he describes the final climax of the religious crisis through which he passed, is one of the most powerful of its kind in French literature :



"Never will that December evening, when the veil that had hitherto concealed from me my own incredulity was torn asunder, fade from my memory. I can still hear the sound of my own footsteps pacing up and down that small, narrow room long after the hour at which I usually retired to bed. I can still see the moon half smothered by clouds, lighting up every now and again the frozen window panes. The hours of the night slipped by without my noticing it. I was anxiously following the process of my own thinking, which, from one strata to another of my mind, gradually descended into my innermost consciousness. Destroying one illusion after another, which till then had hidden the reality from me, it gave me minute by minute a clearer vision of the path along which I had been travelling. In vain I clung to my last remaining beliefs as a shipwrecked mariner clutches at the floating fragments of his ship. In vain, horrified at the unknown abyss into which I felt I was sinking, did I hold myself back for a last time, thinking of my childhood, my family, my country, of all that was dear to me and that I held sacred. The relentless train of my thought was stronger and forced me to abandon everything : family connections, associations and beliefs.

"The process of self-examination became more imperious and severe as the final terminus to which my thoughts were taking me was disclosed. And it did not cease until I had reached it. I

then realized that the foundations of my whole innermost being had caved in. That moment was horrible. Next morning, when I flung myself tired out on to the bed, I could almost feel the serene, peaceful existence which had been mine till then being crushed out of me, and in its place a dark life of isolation beginning—a life in which I was condemned to live alone, alone with my fatal thoughts, which had carried me out there into exile, and which I felt I could curse.”

The Revolution of 1830, in which the Liberals grasped the reins of power, brought Jouffroy out of a position of comparative obscurity and placed him in a university chair at the Sorbonne. Ozanam attended his lectures during the academic year of 1832–33. This is how he described at the time his encounter with the celebrated free-thinker :

“ Since Monsieur Jouffroy had taken the liberty more than once of attacking revealed religion—in fact, of actually denying the possibility of a divine revelation at all—a young Catholic student handed in to him some written objections. The philosopher promised to answer them. He waited for a fortnight, evidently in order to read up the subject better, and at last, without reading out in class the student’s letter, summarized briefly in his own way the objections contained in it and attempted to refute them. Seeing he had not been given a fair chance, the young Catholic wrote the professor a second letter. The latter ignored it and continued

his attacks on the Catholic faith, which, he asserted, was the enemy of Science and Liberty.

"Then we all joined together and wrote out a formal protest, expressing our true feelings. It was signed at once by fifteen students and sent to Jouffroy. This time he could not well avoid reading it out in class. Over two hundred people in the lecture hall listened in respectful silence to our profession of faith.

"The philosopher made an unsuccessful effort to reply. He ended up by offering a lame excuse. He had no intention, he said, of directly attacking the Christian religion, for which he entertained personally feelings of respect and veneration. In future he would be careful to avoid offending the religious convictions of others."

Ozanam and his companions soon realized that their respectfully worded protests, even though they might meet with a measure of success in the lecture hall, were of little avail in neutralizing the demoralizing effects of anti-clerical teaching and propaganda on the rising generation. At the same time it was with a sense of horror that they thought of the deadly havoc wrought amongst the mass of students in a great city like Paris by incredulity, which seemed to be in the very air they breathed. So they founded the debating club to which reference has already been made, and which by an unexpected turn of events became the nucleus out of which the St. Vincent de Paul Society eventually

sprang. They also invited a French priest, Father Gerbert, to give a course of lectures on religious subjects to the students in a private house. These lectures were well attended. Ozanam was radiant with joy. "At last," he wrote to friends in Lyons, "the light shines in the darkness."

But it was a tiny flicker of light in the widespread darkness of Paris. Ozanam and his friends thought of the enormous amount of good which might be done if a similar course of lectures, adapted to the needs of the times, could be delivered from the pulpit of Notre-Dame. Without wasting time they wrote a letter at once, which was signed by about a hundred students, to the Archbishop of Paris, requesting him to allow this.

The Archbishop at that time was Monseigneur de Quelen. He treated them with kindness but took no steps in the matter, partly on account of the difficulty of the political and religious situation. It was only a few months after the sensational apostasy of Lammenais. A year later, though, they sent in a second petition, this time proposing that a course of sermons be preached in Notre-Dame by Lacordaire. The Archbishop was deeply moved when he read the second letter, which began with these words:

"We have witnessed already the return to the true light of several of our fellow-students who had wandered far away because they had never really known it. Oh, if only we might behold their

example followed by others who have not learnt to love Christianity, simply because they have had no chance of appreciating its entrancing beauty ! ”

Monseigneur de Quelen was still more impressed during a private audience which he granted to Ozanam, but felt reluctant to entrust the course of sermons to Lacordaire. Lacordaire had returned to the faith of his childhood some years earlier, after passing through a phase of unbelief. Though this point weighed in his favour with the students, it made the Archbishop feel he must act with caution, the more particularly since Lacordaire had been closely associated with Lammenais as a leader writer on the Catholic paper, the *Avenir*, which had just been condemned.

Then suddenly, through one of those turns of fate which seem humanly inexplicable, Monseigneur de Quelen withdrew his opposition. In March, 1835, Lacordaire ascended for the first time the pulpit of Notre-Dame. His success was certain from the first sermon. And thus owing, in part at least, to the zeal and initiative of Ozanam began that famous series of Lenten sermons which, from the days of Lacordaire down to our own times, have made the pulpit of Notre-Dame famous all over Catholic Europe.

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCOVERY OF HIS VOCATION

ONE day Ozanam beheld a strange sight in the quiet old city of Lyons: three weird-looking men in blue tunics fastened round their waists with a girdle, wearing fur caps beneath which appeared a shock of long, unkempt hair. They explained they had come from Paris and were followers of the doctrines of St. Simon—a forerunner of modern Socialism. They began to spout excitedly at street corners in the poorer quarters of the town, apostrophizing the rich, denouncing the clergy, preaching a new religion and a general redistribution of wealth, until then unjustly concentrated in the hands of a small and dominant minority.

The following extract from an article which appeared on May 10th, 1831, in the *Precursor*, the official organ of the St. Simonians, will give us some idea of their religious tenets:

“The earliest religious ideas of primitive man were expressed by fetichism. This developed into polytheism, later into monotheism. But these

obscure, incomplete ideas became insufficient to satisfy the ever-growing needs of the human spirit. Philosophical criticism destroyed them and paved the way for the Gospel. The Gospel appeared and a new era began. The reign of the flesh was a thing of the past: it was subdued in its turn by the spirit. Society was reconstructed on a new basis, and under the leadership of the Church Europe moved forward for fifteen centuries along the path of moral progress. But Christianity was still far from being able to encompass all the activities of man, or to satisfy the growing needs of human reason. Not recognizing the physical needs of man's nature, it hurled an anathema against the flesh, and consequently against human industry. It discouraged the sciences, the arts and every manifestation of social life. Under its influence all man's faculties, all his energies were concentrated on the contemplation of mysteries and the observance of religious rites. In a word, its promises were too austere, its precepts too difficult for it to suffice for long for a being destined like man to live a material life in a world known through the senses.

"The age of reason came and the yoke of Christianity was deemed too heavy. The ancient mysteries seemed out of date, their cult ridiculous. Three centuries of incredulity and heresy rased to the ground the edifice of Christianity. It became necessary to build up a new edifice amidst those

ruins. The world called for a revealer, and St. Simon arrived."

Ozanam was at that time working in a solicitor's office in Lyons. It is easy to imagine with what feelings of indignation the eighteen-year-old lad must have read this pseudo-scientific tirade, which was intended to pave the way for the work of the St. Simonians in the city. He dashed off in haste a couple of articles refuting the charges made and sent them in at once to the editor. They were published in the paper with a promise that they would be answered in due course—but the answer was never given.

Encouraged by his friends, Ozanam rewrote both articles and published them in book form under the title of "Some Reflections on the Doctrines of St. Simon." Although this book shows obvious traces of its being from the pen of a very young man, it was favourably received by the public, and the author was complimented on what he had written by no less a person than Chateaubriand. More important is the fact that it helped him to discover his real literary vocation—that of the defence of Christianity by means of historical essays.

The best parts of the book are not those in which the author rebuts the clumsy accusations made against Christianity by the St. Simonians—no very difficult matter—but rather those passages in which he deals with the benefits which have accrued to



civilization from the influence of Christianity. Here is an example which reveals the workings of the mind of this eighteen-year-old French lad :

"At the voice of the Gospel the fetters of slavery are broken, the foundations of despotism are shaken. The Emperor Theodosius does penance in sackcloth and ashes for the massacre of his rebellious subjects. Clovis and all his people are baptized, great princes kneel at the communion rails by the side of their most humble subjects, the same cross is placed above the tombs of the high-born and the lowly. Charity and the love of man for man ! This precept produces martyrs and makes saints like St. Vincent de Paul. It forces open the hands of the rich and fills those of the poor. It builds hospices and develops a sense of compassion for the sick and ailing. It gives bread to the widow, a home to the orphan and a place of refuge to the penitent sinner. It destroys the spirit of hatred, places a priest between two enemies eager to rend each other in pieces. Between Christian kings, when discord causes them to regard each other as foes, it places as a peacemaker the Pope."

PART II

THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

## CHAPTER V

### A GRAIN OF MUSTARD SEED

ONE chilly September evening in the year 1827 a poor working-class woman, Marie Gonet, was suddenly taken ill in the streets of Turin. She was travelling with her husband and children from Milan to Lyons in search of work and, as chance would have it, had stopped for the day in Turin. Owing to red tape and officialism the doors of two large hospitals where she might have been taken care of remained closed. Finally she was left in a critical condition in a cramped and wretched room on the ground floor of a low lodging-house.

Summoned in haste from the nearby Church of the Corpus Domini, a priest administered the last sacraments. His heart was touched by the pitiful spectacle of a young wife and mother dying simply from lack of proper attention. As he heard the whimpering of her children and the bitter invectives against the heartlessness of the hospital authorities uttered by her husband he felt—and knew at last—that his hour had come. For forty years, so it seemed to him, he had been waiting only for that

moment. From the day when, as a small boy, his mother had discovered him in their cottage home at Bra measuring with a piece of string the walls of one of her rooms. "Mother," he had asked her eagerly then, "how many beds for sick people could you put in this room?"

Hastily he retraced his steps to the church and ordered the sacristan to toll the bells. "What? At this hour of the night? There's no service!" The grumbling sacristan shuffled off to the belfry. But Canon Giuseppe Cottolengo was already on his knees before the altar of Our Lady and had begun to say the Rosary. Gradually the expression on his features underwent a curious change; the lines of anguish and indignation disappeared, a look of serenity shone on his countenance. Suddenly his eyes lit up with joy. "The grace has been granted," he murmured, rising slowly to his feet.

Such was the origin of a great institution which may well be compared with the St. Vincent de Paul Society, founded by Ozanam, the *Piccola Casa della Divina Provvidenza*, a hospice founded by Cottolengo for the outcasts and incurably diseased of the city of Turin.

In after years Cottolengo would frequently make use in conversation of this simile. The works of men are like a pyramid—a pyramid with a wide, spreading base, firmly planted on the ground, built to withstand the wind and rain and the ravages of time. Great beginnings followed by slight achieve-

ments. For as the masonry rises higher and higher the dimensions of the building grow smaller and smaller, culminating at last in one single minute point. Not so the works of God. The works of God resemble a pyramid standing on its apex. The point scarcely touches the ground, but the pyramid turned upside down widens out as it rises higher and higher towards the skies, nor is there any limit to its possible development. A Rosary before Our Lady's altar recited by a priest with an anxious and troubled heart. This was the apex of the pyramid which barely touched this earth. A few "Hail, Marys!" And from this simple beginning grew a wonderful achievement. The first sick patients cared for by Cottolengo soon developed into a score, a hundred. Now in that great charitable institution, which he founded a hundred years ago in Turin, the inmates are numbered by thousands.

So too with the Conferences of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. As Cottolengo left the death-bed of that poor woman in Turin with an uneasy conscience, so in Paris six years later Ozanam, with an anxious and beating heart, left that noisy meeting of university students which has been described in the Introduction to this volume. "Ozanam, Christianity has done wonders in the past, but what is it doing now in Paris for the poor? Show us what practical benefit the working man reaps from your religion and we too will believe in it."

Like Cottolengo, Ozanam too realized that his hour had come. He was stung to action by those words. Perhaps he had been unconsciously awaiting that moment all his life. "*Allons aux pauvres!*" ("Let us go to the poor!") he burst out hotly to his companions. He left the hall, went out and founded the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

A pyramid standing on its apex. The simile of Cottolengo is equally exact as a description of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. From a worldly point of view the new society had no prospects. It had no influence or money behind it. Its first members were eight inexperienced university students. Their first activity was to carry a few pieces of wood up to a garret to help to kindle a fire to bring warmth and comfort to a destitute family.

A kindly action. From that modest beginning the great pyramid of the St. Vincent de Paul Society grew. The point of the pyramid was so minute it scarcely touched the ground. It has widened out ever since, for its base is turned upwards towards Heaven. From an insignificant little group of students, to whom a room was lent for their meetings as a special favour, the Society has grown until it has now well over 100,000 members and over 7500 different centres of activity.

But this is not all. Not only has the St. Vincent de Paul Society grown like the mustard seed of the Gospel, but it has played its part in remoulding society on more Catholic lines. No less an authority

don Albert de Mun, one of the great leaders of the Catholic movement for social reform in France, has written the following highly significant words :

"The Conferences of the St. Vincent de Paul Society were the great school of experience in which we first learned to serve the cause of the people. Out of them sprang the whole Catholic Social Movement of the nineteenth century."

Nor is De Mun alone in pointing to Ozanam as a pioneer of Catholic Social Service who forestalled in those far-distant days the ideas later developed more fully by Leo XIII in the *Rerum Novarum*.

The abject condition of the working classes in industrialized Europe at the time when Ozanam founded the St. Vincent de Paul Society has been immortalized by Tom Hood in the "Song of the Shirt":

"Stitch—stitch—stitch,  
In poverty, hunger and dirt,  
Sewing at once, with a double thread,  
A shroud as well as a shirt."

The evil results of the old Classical School of Economics were patent then all over Western Europe. Despite the fact that the divorce of economics from ethics had been advocated by Adam Smith as a method of study rather than as a definite position of thought, it had become a fundamental tenet of the doctrines of his followers. The accumulation of wealth had come to be viewed

as an end simply in itself—no longer as a means towards a higher end. The law of utility had become the natural pivot round which the whole economic life of society revolved. Every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost. Revolutions broke out in the name of Liberty in one country after another. Crowns tumbled from the heads of kings and the “Sovereignty of the People” was proclaimed. And in reality the common people sank deeper and deeper into the morass of economic slavery.

A reaction against capitalism and the old school of *laissez-faire* arose during Ozanam's lifetime. The abstraction known as the *homo œconomicus* began to be repudiated. The mere accumulation of wealth by individuals ceased to be viewed so much as an end in itself as in connection with certain higher manifestations of the life of the social body to which the individual belonged.

This movement, however, brought in its train other attendant evils. From the materialistic utilitarianism of the school of Adam Smith the pendulum began to swing in the direction of a new type of utilitarianism which transcended the individual, whose economic interests and activities became merged in the higher interests and activities of the State.

The barque of society had run a serious danger of being dashed to pieces on the Scylla of atomistic Liberalism. Soon it would be in deadly peril of



being sucked down by the Charybdis of State Socialism. It was at this moment, just as the tide was beginning to turn, that Ozanam founded the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE SPIRIT OF THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

OUR main purpose was not simply to alleviate the sufferings of the poor. No. This was only a means towards an end. Our true aim was to preserve intact in ourselves the Catholic faith in all its purity and to communicate it to others through the channel of charity. We wished to be able to answer those who, in the words of the psalmist, asked of us: '*Ubi est Deus eorum?*' (Where is their God?)"

These words from the writings of Ozanam bring out clearly enough what, in the mind of the founder, should be the spirit of every Conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. It is something more than mere philanthropy. The members should not be content with simply signing food tickets or handing over cash. More than this is required.

"Do not imagine," he continues, "that looking upon charity as a means of preserving faith in any sense involves taking a narrow view of this wonderful virtue. On the contrary, it broadens it out to still vaster proportions, by teaching us that when

we visit the poor we ourselves gain even more than they do. The sight of their pitiable condition serves to make us less self-centred, and so fills our hearts with such a sense of gratitude that we cannot help loving them. How often, when depressed owing to some private sorrow or even to ill-health, have I entered the dwellings of those poor souls entrusted to my care and, finding there so many others in worse distress than myself, have felt ashamed of my own low spirits. I have been strengthened to bear my own troubles and therefore have actually felt grateful to those unfortunate beings who have consoled me with the sight of their own wretchedness. How is it possible under such circumstances not to care for them ? ”

Obviously, then, the spirit of the St. Vincent de Paul Society involves something more than mere almsgiving. Otherwise a Conference would lay itself open to the old taunt of being “as cold as charity.” Each Conference should constitute a school of experience in which the members may learn the true meaning of the word charity.

“That spirit of charity,” to quote Ozanam once again, “which sheds bitter tears over the ills it cannot cure, which comforts with a kiss the heart of the neglected and ragged urchin, which speaks as a friend to those on the threshold of life, which watches with tender solicitude by the bedside of the sick, and listens without any sign of impatience

to the lengthy oft-repeated complaints of the unfortunate."

Experience had given Ozanam a clearer insight into the feelings of that large section of the French nation which had drifted away from the Church. He now felt that the exercise of charity, rightly understood, provided a surer means of bringing back an unbelieving generation to Christ than either controversy or apologetics.

Let him speak once more for himself :

"When the members of the first Conferences entered the garrets of the poor, brought bread to the hungry and sent neglected street urchins to school, when it began to be understood that they were the true friends of the people, then those outside the sphere of the Church's influence not only forbore from hindering them, but treated them with respect. For, although our century is corrupt in many ways, it is only just to admit that it deserves this meed of praise ; that it honours and respects those who devote themselves to bettering the lot of the poor. In the height of the terror of 1793, when the mob was desecrating altars and looting churches, someone actually proposed putting up a statue to St. Vincent de Paul, as he was a benefactor of humanity. And, if I may be allowed to make use of an expression in a certain sense impious and sacrilegious, the revolutionaries, considering the benefits he had bestowed on the people, forgave him the crime of having loved God."

THE SPIRIT OF THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

Ozanam develops this idea more fully in the following extract from a letter to a friend who was thinking of founding a Conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Nîmes :

" Society to-day seems to me to be not unlike the wayfarer described in the parable of the Good Samaritan. For, while journeying along the road mapped out for it by Christ, it has been set upon by thieves of evil human thought. Bad men have despoiled the wayfarer of all his goods, of the treasures of faith and love, and left him stripped and broken by the wayside. The priests and the Levites have passed him by. But this time, being real priests and true Levites, they have approached the suffering wretched creature and attempted to cure him. But in his delirium he has not recognized them and has driven them away. Then we weak Samaritans, outsiders as we are, have dared to approach this great sick patient. Perhaps he will be less affrighted by us ? Let us try to measure the extent of his wounds in order to pour oil into them. Let us make words of peace and consolation ring in his ears. Then, when his eyes are opened, we will hand him over to the tender care of those whom God has chosen to be the guardians and doctors of souls."

The Socialists of those days taunted Ozanam with confining his efforts to the alleviation of individual suffering without attempting to destroy the cause of suffering. To this he answered that

society can only be reformed by first reforming the character of the individuals of whom society is made up. This, he pointed out, had always been the policy of the Church. She had aimed at building up a new world by fostering amongst individual men the spirit of justice and brotherly love. His Socialist critics were engaged rather in breeding a spirit of hatred between man and man and provoking war between the classes.

"Certainly," he continues, "we must endeavour to go to the root of the evil and by wise social reforms try to reduce the widespread distress. But we are convinced that a knowledge of the reforms which it is necessary to introduce is to be learned not so much by pondering over books, or by discussions among politicians, as by going to visit the garrets in which the poor live; by sitting at the bedside of the dying, by feeling the cold which they feel, and by learning from their own lips the causes of their woes. When we have done this, not simply for a few months, but for many years, when we have studied the poor in their homes, in the schools and in the hospitals, not only in one but in many cities, then we really begin to understand a little of this formidable problem of poverty. Then we have the right to suggest reforms which, instead of putting the fear of God into their hearts, would bring peace and hope to all."

## CHAPTER VII

### INFLUENCE OF THE SPIRIT OF ST. VINCENT DE PAUL

THE choice of St. Vincent de Paul, the great apostle of charity in seventeenth-century France, as the patron of the new society is not hard to understand. Were not the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul carrying on work amongst the poor very similar to that which Frederick Ozanam and his companions had in view? Did not a Sister of Charity, Sister Rosalie, actually guide their footsteps when they first set out to visit the poor in Paris?

In 1617 St. Vincent de Paul—at that time parish priest of a little French country village, Chatillon le Dombes—founded the world-wide organization of the Sisters of Charity. Its origins, like those of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, founded in 1833 by Ozanam, were very simple and obscure.

One Sunday morning after Mass, as St. Vincent was just going into the pulpit to explain the Gospel, a good woman in the parish, hastening up to him, asked him to mention at the beginning of his sermon that a poor family of peasants living

on the outskirts of the village were in desperate straits. Not only did St. Vincent speak about it to the congregation, but he enlarged on the duty incumbent on every Christian to help his neighbour, particularly the poor, and especially the sick. His words touched the hearts of his hearers.

During the rest of the day there was a regular procession from the village of kind-hearted people, carrying presents of bread, meat and wine to the destitute family. Towards sundown St. Vincent went to visit them himself. Noticing what quantities of food which had been left there, he exclaimed: "This is certainly an example of genuine charity, but it is badly organized. These poor people will not be able to make use of all this food. Some of it will go bad. And when their stock of provisions is exhausted they will find themselves once more on the verge of starvation."

It was then that he conceived the idea of organizing regular distributions of relief to the poverty-stricken; of having special visits paid beforehand to their homes to find out their circumstances. He invited several ladies of his acquaintance to discuss the project with him. Together they laid down the lines on which they thought this could best be done. It was August 23rd, 1617. The first steps had been taken towards the foundation of a charitable organization destined rapidly to spread throughout the known world—the Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul.



Two hundred years later Ozanam found the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul already in existence, and carrying on the same kind of work which he and his companions wished to do. On them he modelled his own institution. But he introduced an important modification. Whereas St. Vincent had relied on *women* to attend to the sick and relieve the needs of the poor, Ozanam decided to entrust this duty to *young men*. Not that the one institution was intended in any sense to supplant the other. The St. Vincent de Paul Society of Ozanam was simply a development of the spirit of St. Vincent already existing in the Sisters of Charity.

When one bears this in mind it is easy to understand why Ozanam should have chosen the name St. Vincent de Paul Society for the organization which he founded. That the meetings should be called "Conferences" is a reminder that they were founded by a writer, a man of letters, a university lecturer. Every man brings into his work something of his own personality. Did not St. Ignatius, a soldier by profession, adopt for the nascent Society of Jesus the military term "company"?

"To choose a patron saint," writes Ozanam, "does not mean simply adopting a figurehead which will help us to cut a good figure in the religious world. A patron saint is a model whom we must try to imitate, as he has striven himself to imitate the Divine Model, Jesus Christ. It means trying to carry on the work he has started,

endeavouring to acquire something of his warmth of heart, attempting to catch up the threads of the thoughts which were in his brain. A patron saint provides a model for us to copy on this earth and a protector who will watch over us from Heaven."

Here we touch on another important point, that of the spiritual formation of the members of each Conference. It was the novel and original idea of Ozanam to give to young men, in fact to university students, a chance of doing work similar to that done by the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul. It is obvious what the psychological reaction on university students of what to them is an unusual experience is likely to be. It is bound to have both a steadying and ennobling effect on their characters. The young man belonging to a well-to-do family who thus, for the first time in his life perhaps, is brought into actual contact with people who are insufficiently clad and have not enough to eat, will be more careful in future as to how and where he spends his own money. Again, at a critical time in life he has placed before his own eyes examples of the havoc wrought by folly, loose living and vice. He will be less likely, too, to be discouraged by the first difficulties he meets with in life, moody and discontented with his lot, when he meets frequently others so much worse off than he is.

A widening and softening process will take place in the young man's heart as he strives to imitate

the charity of his patron, St. Vincent de Paul, who on his part endeavoured when on this earth to imitate the charity of Christ.

This has been splendidly illustrated by the example of Pier Giorgio Frassati, a student in the Engineering Schools at the University of Turin, who died in 1925 at only twenty-four years of age, and the Cause of whose beatification is under consideration in Rome.

During the lifetime of their founder the Conferences of the St. Vincent de Paul Society spread from France to Italy. In Turin they were first introduced by Don Bosco and Silvio Pellico. The city of Turin has always been one of those in which charitable organizations of every kind have flourished exceedingly. In this respect it is perhaps the most outstanding in the whole of Italy. To-day may be seen in the Valdocco quarter the spacious buildings of three vast organizations: the institution founded for orphan girls a hundred years ago by the Marchesa Barolo, the hospice of Cottolengo, and the mother house of the Salesians of Don Bosco. But besides these how many other institutions of a similar nature exist all over the city! It is easy to realize that the St. Vincent de Paul Society found in Turin most fertile soil in which to develop.

A Conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society has existed for many years in connection with the Catholic University Students' Club. Of the influ-

ence of the spirit of St. Vincent de Paul on the members of the Conference, all of them young men studying at the University, much could be written. How many young men gained enormously in spiritual depth as a result of their experiences as members of this Conference during their student days !

Pier Giorgio Frassati was one of these. So intense became his interest in this work that even on his death-bed he did not forget the poor families committed to his charge. The last words he wrote, in scarcely legible handwriting, were to remind his brother members at the Conference to take some medicine to a poor sick woman whom he knew was waiting for it.

Shortly afterwards the paralysis, which had been slowly creeping upwards from his lower limbs, reached his arms. While the note he had written was being read at the Conference his spirit winged its way to God.

A full account of the influence of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in helping to form the character of Pier Giorgio Frassati may be gained from his *Life*, recently published by Messrs. Burns and Oates.

PART III  
MANHOOD

## CHAPTER VIII

### ON THE THRESHOLD OF LIFE

WE have followed the thread of Frederick Ozanam's life up to the year 1833, when, as a university student in Paris, he founded the St. Vincent de Paul Society.

His natural inclination was to study literature and history, but in the meanwhile, in obedience to his father's wishes, he was attending lectures in the law schools at the Sorbonne.

Of the struggle going on in his soul between these inclinations and his sense of duty we may learn something from the following extract from a letter to his mother :

"I force myself to work at my legal studies for at least seven or eight hours every day. . . . From every direction, though, I can feel myself being drawn towards a career which has nothing to do with my studies in jurisprudence. Whenever there is a meeting, or a lecture on some literary subject, I am asked to take the chair. Five or six magazines and a few newspapers ask me to send them

articles. In short, a number of circumstances, which I have by no means sought to create, hedge me round, grant me no quarter, and conspire to drag me by main force out of the rut in which I have been lying. . . . Is it not within the bounds of possibility that this concourse of circumstances may be a sign of the will of God ? ”

The year following he passed his intermediate examinations in law and was preparing to sit for the same examinations in literature. He did so and was successful. During the summer vacation, which he spent in Lyons, he wrote an essay on “Two Chancellors of England: St. Thomas à Becket and Bacon.” He pointed out the contrast between these two great men, developing the theme that the former was a fine product of Christian philosophy, the latter a victim of rationalism. On his return to Paris he made up his mind to take two degrees, one in Law and the other in Literature.

On April 30th, 1836, he took his degree with honours in Law. He would have liked to have remained in Paris during the summer months, quietly preparing to take a degree in Literature. His father, however, insisted on his returning to Lyons to begin his professional career there as a lawyer. At Lyons, though, in his spare moments he was busy preparing the two theses required for the degree in Literature, one in Latin and one in French.

Frederick had just gone back to Paris in the spring of 1837 to work in the public libraries of the capital and collect material for the thesis he was preparing on the philosophy of Dante when he received startling news from Lyons.

Dr. Ozanam was lying seriously ill. The old man had slipped on a steep staircase leading up to a garret to which he had been climbing on an errand of mercy. He never recovered from the fall. Frederick hastened back to Lyons—too late, though, to see his father again alive.

Once again we may best learn to know his feelings from his correspondence. The following extract from a letter to a friend was written at this moment of intense suffering :

“The keen edge of our sorrow is blunted when we remember my father’s piety, deepened as it was during the closing years of his life by frequent use of the sacraments. His virtues, his work, his sufferings, the dangers through which he passed during his life, must all have helped him to reach more easily the heavenly homeland where we too, if we are good, shall soon find him once more, in that eternal resting place where there shall be no more death. As the number of those souls whom we have loved and who have left us increases in that invisible world, so much the more strongly do we feel the force of attraction which draws us towards it. We feel less bound to this earth when



the roots by which we were attached to it have been broken by the passage of time."

In order to be near his widowed mother, whose health had been undermined by the shock of her husband's sudden death, Frederick now decided definitely to settle down in Lyons.

When Dr. Ozanam's estate was eventually wound up his widow and children were left by no means well off. "When I examined his accounts," writes Frederick, "I found that at least a third of his consultations had been given to patients from whom he never expected any payment—to poverty stricken persons whom everyone knew could not pay their bills." Frederick was already a lawyer. But from the exercise of his profession he could not hope to earn enough to supply all the needs of his family. For this reason he took the necessary steps in order to obtain a post as a professor of Commercial Law at the University of Lyons.

Frederick Ozanam was a born teacher. In his lectures he spoke to his pupils with a degree of eloquence and with an accent of persuasion which he himself admitted he was unable to communicate to his writings. In France the whole intellectual life of the nation is concentrated in Paris, and in Paris alone, as a lecturer at the University, would a fitting place have been found for him. The aged Rector of the University of Lyons sensed the danger of the young professor going some day to

Paris. In order to bind him more closely to the University of Lyons he offered him besides the chair of Commercial Law that of Foreign Literature, which had become vacant just at that moment. Ozanam gladly accepted, since it meant an increase in his salary and an opportunity to dedicate a portion of his time to his favourite studies.

The appointment, however, had to be ratified by the Minister of Education, who at that moment was the celebrated French philosopher Victor Cousin. Cousin, who had known Ozanam during his student days in Paris, was most favourably disposed towards him. Other forces, however, were working against the young professor, and succeeded in delaying for some weeks his appointment.

At last Ozanam determined to go to Paris himself to straighten things out. He called on Cousin, was most well received. The Minister invited him to lunch, assured him that his appointment to the professorship of Foreign Literature at Lyons would be duly ratified—on one condition, however: that he would sit as a candidate for the Chair of Foreign Literature at the Sorbonne in an examination which was to be held in the following September. "Not," he explained, "that I expect you to be nominated for the post, but I wish this public examination, the first of its kind which has taken place, to be as brilliant a show as possible. I am

anxious that several really brilliant young men should take part in it. Do me this favour, and afterwards, whatever may be the result, you will receive your appointment to Lyons."

Ozanam could not well refuse. Yet this entailed preparing in the short space of six months a vast programme, which included not only classics but four foreign literatures, namely, English, German, Spanish and Italian. He set to work at once studying for eighteen hours a day till the date fixed for the examination drew near. During the journey from Lyons to Paris, which took three days, he was unable to get a moment's sleep. He was pale, worn out and feverish when he entered the examination hall. There he found already seated six other candidates, men all older than himself, holding important posts in the best colleges in Paris. They took little notice of the new candidate who had come from the provinces—from Lyons—and smiled when they learned that he was a teacher of Commercial Law.

Eight hours were allowed for the written examination, two essays, one in Latin on "What were the Causes of the Decay of Tragedy amongst the Writers of Ancient Rome?"; the other in French on "The Historical Value of the Funeral Orations of Bossuet." Ozanam was unable to do more than write out a skeleton of the theme to be developed. He felt discouraged and wished to withdraw from the competition. But his old

friend Professor Ampère persuaded him to sit for the oral examination. Here Ozanam was more successful and his courage revived.

He gave evidence of possessing such wide and solid general culture that the examiners eventually passed him over the heads of the other competitors. His victory was finally won by his thesis of Dante, which he defended so brilliantly that the public admitted into the hall burst out into applause. "Monsieur Ozanam," exclaimed Cousin, "it is impossible to be more eloquent than you have been."

Thus Ozanam by an unexpected turn of events found himself nominated to a professorship, not at Lyons, but at the Sorbonne, the intellectual centre of Paris and of France.

The happiness this success brought him was tarnished by the death a few months later in Lyons of his mother, who had been in failing health.

We find the following allusion to his mother's death in his correspondence :

"She—from whom I had learnt the rudiments of faith—was for me like a living image of the Church, who is also our mother. She seemed to me like a perfect embodiment of Providence. Now I feel much the same as did the disciples after the Ascension of the Lord. I feel as though the Divinity had withdrawn itself from me. . . . Oh! ask of God to send me, as He did to the orphaned disciples,

the consoling spirit, the Paraclete. I wish only to have sufficient strength to continue to the end my earthly pilgrimage—in a few years, perhaps in a few days, to end my life in the way my mother did hers.”

## CHAPTER IX

### MARRIAGE

“THE year 1840 was drawing to a close,” writes Lacordaire. “Ozanam was twenty-seven years old. What a wonderful day that is when a man who has advanced ‘midway along the road of this our mortal life,’ with clear vision and a tranquil heart, learns at last what are God’s plans for him and begins to build up the house in which he will end his days! Before then his grandest dreams are troubled, moments of enthusiasm are quickly followed by moments of depression, and the more one has received from God so much the greater—as one realizes the vast possibilities which His gifts possess—is one filled with a sense of uncertainty as regards the future. Ozanam, who had gone through these sufferings—to the extent even of their affecting his health—must have felt a great sense of joy and comfort when, having learnt at last what was God’s will, he peacefully embraced it.”

The death of his parents left him free now to come to a definite decision about his own future. The idea of the priesthood flashed for an instant

before his mind. In his moment of bereavement he felt more forcibly than he had ever done before the vanity of all earthly things. His friend, Lacordaire, who as a secular priest had caused such a sensation by his Lenten services in the cathedral of Notre-Dame, had made up his mind just about this time to enter the Dominican Order, and was going through his novitiate in Rome. He would dearly have loved Ozanam to have joined him in the cloister. Divine Providence, however, did not intend Ozanam to serve as a priest at the altar, but rather to be a champion of the Church in the world of thought; he was destined, not for the pulpit, but for a university chair.

His first duty at the Sorbonne was to act as assistant lecturer to Professor Fauriel—the friend of Manzoni. Ozanam chose as the subject for his course of lectures that year the “*Nibelungen*,” the collection of old German legends about the Rhine. How could he adequately deal, though, with those old German poems without some knowledge of the setting of the story? Out of a sense of duty, in order to render his lectures as full of interest as possible, he went for a journey up the Rhine country, visiting all those spots to which allusion is made in the poems. On his return to France after this journey two important events in his life awaited him: his first course of lectures at the Sorbonne and his marriage.

“I feel within me an empty void, which neither

friendship nor study can fill entirely," writes Ozanam about this time. "I know not who will fill this empty space, whether it be God, or one of His creatures. If it be a creature, I trust that she will not come too soon, before I have been able to render myself worthy of her. I trust that she will be endowed with all those necessary external graces so as not to leave room later for disillusionment. But above all I trust that she will possess solid virtues and a good heart, that she may be worth much more than I am and so draw me upwards rather than drag me downhill, that she may be resolute since I am faint-hearted, that she may be fervent since I am lukewarm, that she may be filled with a sense of compassion so that I may not feel too strongly in her presence my own sense of inferiority. These are my desires, these are my hopes. . . ."

In Lyons he continued to take entirely into his confidence Father Noirot, who had befriended him since boyhood. That excellent priest, who had such a high opinion of him, became more and more anxious at the growing sense of isolation from the world which he noticed in him. Whenever Frederick sought his advice as to what course he should follow in the future, he replied invariably: "You should get married." And so, following his advice, Ozanam became engaged to Amelia Soulacroix, the daughter of the Rector of the University of Lyons.



They were married by Ozanam's elder brother, Alphonse—who had become a priest—in the Church of St. Nizier, in Lyons, on June 23rd, 1841. His younger brother, Charles, was the server at the nuptial Mass.

## CHAPTER X

### OZANAM'S DEBT TO ITALY

OZANAM was born in Italy, and may be said almost to have died there. The last weeks of his life were spent at Pisa and in the neighbourhood of Leghorn, from whence he took ship only to die on French soil soon after landing at Marseilles. From Italy he derived too the subjects of the most popular of his writings—his studies on Dante and on St. Francis of Assisi.

The first time that he left France to travel to Italy—the land of his birth—was in 1833. He was accompanied by his parents and his elder brother, Alphonse.

The party travelled through Piedmont and Lombardy to Milan, where Frederick was able to pay a visit to the church in which he had been baptized. As they passed through northern Italy his father, who had fought through the Napoleonic Wars, had many an interesting tale to tell of the battles in which he had taken part. At Bologna Frederick walked round the quadrangles of the ancient university afire with enthusiasm as

memories of the great men of learning who had taught there in the past rose to the surface in his mind.

In Rome the future historian of the Middle Ages was deeply impressed by a visit paid to the Vatican Library. "From this first visit to Italy," writes his brother Alphonse, "he drew the inspiration for his studies on the philosophy and literature of the age of Dante. From this time dates that passionate love which grew on him for that great philosopher and wonderful poet, whose elevating doctrines he continued to study for the rest of his life. One may say that after his first visit to Florence the shadow of Dante followed him everywhere. The 'Divine Comedy' became for him an inexhaustible source of treasures, so much so that, when one considers the whole of his literary work, it is easy to realize that the philosophy of the thirteenth century is at the back of all his writings. Thus the philosophical ideas of Dante, which he chose as the subject for his degree in Literature, became the foundation stones of a majestic edifice which he set himself the task of building, not for his own glory, but for that of God and as a vindication of Catholicity."

The second journey which he made to Italy was during his honeymoon. He feasted his eyes on the indescribable beauty of the coast scenery round Naples, Gaeta and Salerno. He beheld for the first time those volcanic headlands and islands

where, amidst semi-tropical vegetation, legend has it that the sirens dwelt of old. It is easy to imagine the impression made on his highly sensitive nature by the enchanting vision of the deep blue Neapolitan sky and sea and of the vines trained to grow up the poplar trees, with their tendrils hanging in festoons of dark green foliage from the boughs. How he must have feasted his eyes of the orange and myrtle groves around Sorrento—the birthplace of Tasso!

From the contemplation of the entrancing beauties of Nature his mind would pass to the re-evocation of lost civilizations. He went to visit the pagan temple of Pæstum, the excavations at Pompeii and Herculaneum, and the palace of the Emperor Tiberius at Capri. How many thousands of slaves had been worked to death in order to build the island palace of that imperial reprobate! Such, he remembered, was the lot of mankind at the time when the Redeemer was sent into this world. Yet a few years would pass by and St. Paul, the herald of a new civilization, would disembark at Pozzuoli.

His feelings during his second visit to Rome were of a similar nature. "It is not without deep emotion," he writes, "that one kneels down near the tombs of the Apostles and prays before that simple piece of stonework which hides from our eyes the mortal remains of St. Peter. It is not for nothing that one descends into the catacombs,

which are like the heart of Catholic Rome. I feel a fresh sense of vigour in my brain. My thoughts, which were growing sluggish, become more supple and embrace a wider field. The dome of St. Peter's is like the tiara of the papacy hanging between Heaven and earth. From the sea-coast of Italy the mariner may catch a glimpse of that cupola. Sometimes from the summit of the neighbouring hills one may behold the sun setting behind it. It is like a wonderful symbol of that institution which we see, firm and immovable, whilst we pass by on the waves of time. Behind it the sun will go down on the last day of the human race."

Ozanam's third visit to Italy took place in December, 1846. He remained with his wife and daughter in the Granduchy of Tuscany during the spring of the following year. He describes the view from the top of the cathedral in Florence in the following words: "Beneath me was spread out the vast expanse of the cupola of the Duomo . . . in front of me rose the campanile of Giotto, the most beautiful tower that has carried up to Heaven the prayers of men; at a lower level and looking, owing to the perspective, almost as if it had been crushed flat was the baptistry of S. Giovanni. In the distance stood the Palazzo Vecchio, with the proud inscription of Savonarola engraved on the walls: 'Jesus Christ, King of the Florentines, by decree of the Senate and People.'"

At Pisa, looking at the cathedral, he felt full of

admiration for the way in which the builders, realizing that a church should be like a Heavenly Jerusalem, had constructed it in 1063. "The pillars and masonry are so light that it is impossible to say whether the building has risen up from the greensward beneath, or come down to earth from the sky above. . . . Every different style of art has been fused into harmony in its construction. In this it resembles Christianity, which possesses the secret of knowing how to use and consecrate everything it finds on earth. It is like the immortal Church, which is a home for the elect in all places and at all times."

Of Ozanam's last visit to Tuscany shortly before his death we shall speak in detail anon.

## CHAPTER XI

OZANAM IN 1848

THE story of Ozanam's life in Paris after his marriage is the story of his lectures at the Sorbonne. He made use of the material in these lectures in learned publications which appeared one after the other.

Thus in the academic year 1843-44 he lectured on the history of Italy during the so-called Dark Ages, from the fall of the Roman Empire to the time of Charlemagne. The year following he lectured on English Literature. In the meantime he was appointed as successor to Professor Fauriel, who died in 1844, and whose assistant lecturer he had been till then.

One of his pupils, who later became a professor of Philosophy at the Sorbonne, has given the following account of the impression he made on the students who flocked to hear his lectures :

"I have never known a teacher more popular than he was. Young men felt drawn towards him by a strong bond of sympathy which was mutual and sincere on both sides."

Even Renan, who attended his lectures as a young man, writes as follows :

" I never leave one of his lectures without feeling strengthened, more determined to do something great, more full of courage and hope as regards the future. . . . Ozanam's course of lectures are a continual defence of everything which is most worthy of our admiration. . . . Ozanam, how fond of him we were ! What a fine soul ! "

Coming as it does from a free-thinker, who developed into a determined enemy of all that Ozanam stood for, this testimony carries added weight.

The even tenor of his life was rudely broken by the revolution which broke out in Paris in February, 1848, and transformed the " bourgeois " monarchy of Louis Philippe into the Second Republic.

The downfall of Louis Philippe was the signal for a series of revolutions which broke out all over Europe. In Italy one government collapsed after another. The people of Milan rose in a body and, after five days' fighting, drove out the Austrian Viceroy and the Austrian garrison. The Dukes of Parma and Modena were driven from their States by popular uprisings. To the south of the Apennines the Republican Party, headed by the anti-clerical novel writer Domenico Guerrazzi, a native of Leghorn, gained the upper hand and drove the Grand Duke Leopold II from the throne of Tuscany. Pius IX, after the assassination of his prime



minister, Pellegrino Rossi, fled from Rome to Gaeta, in the nearby kingdom of Naples. The eyes of the Italian patriots, who looked forward to a free and united Italy, were fixed on Charles Albert, King of Piedmont, who in the following spring declared war on Austria.

In France events moved swiftly. The monarchy of Louis Philippe had represented the victory of Liberal bourgeois classes over the Legitimists. But the common people had gained little from the change of regime; in fact, their condition had been aggravated by the rise of Industrialism. Now the factory hands rose against the factory owners, and the proletariat, in Paris at least, made a desperate attempt to snatch by force the reins of power from the capitalist classes.

When the monarchy fell Ozanam entered the National Guard, which was formed to maintain order. The members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in Paris tended the wounded during the street fighting.

On February 24th the mob sacked the royal palace of the Tuileries. Several members of the Society made their way into the chapel in an attempt to prevent the desecration of chalices and sacred vestments. When they came out into the open the rabble began to jeer and hoot at them. But when one of them, raising aloft a crucifix which he was carrying, shouted out: "Men and women, you wish to begin a new existence, to be

able to lead freer and more noble lives. Do not forget that you can only be regenerated by Christ!" a number of voices answered: "Yes, yes, He is our Master!" Many hats were raised and caps pulled off at the cry: "Long live Christ!" Thus the small party were able to wend their way through the crowd and reach the nearby church of St. Roche without mishap, where they gave the sacred vessels and church furniture into the charge of the parish priest.

Three days later Lacordaire, who was preaching from the pulpit of Notre-Dame on the existence of God, alluded to this incident in the following words:

"Thanks be to Heaven we believe in God! Were I to doubt of your faith the doors of this ancient fane would swing wide open, and one glance at the inhabitants of this city would be enough to dumbfound me. Not long since the populace, conscious of their power, carried in their own hands, associating Him in their victory, the image of the Son of God made man."

At these words from the preacher his hearers, unable to restrain their enthusiasm, burst out into applause in the body of the church.

In June, 1848, three months after the downfall of the monarchy, the populace of Paris were incited once more to revolt against the provisional government. Civil war, with all its horrors, broke out in the capital. The poorer quarters were transformed

into regular battle-fields. Streets were barricaded. The rebels organized themselves into an army and threatened to break into the centre of the city. Street fights became the order of the day and blood ran freely.

Ozanam, who had joined up once more in the National Guard, felt that the conflict would cease if only the voice of religion could reach the hearts of the rebels. He requested an audience of Monseigneur Affre, Archbishop of Paris, who was greatly respected by all classes of society in the capital.

Monseigneur Affre had had for some days a similar thought in his mind. He accepted Ozanam's suggestion as an inspiration from God. He obtained a passport from the military authorities which would allow him to reach the danger zone, also a free pardon for the rebels if they would lay down their arms. He returned to his palace and, after going to confession, set out with Ozanam and two of his friends for the scene of fighting. As he passed through the streets he was heard frequently repeating to himself the words of the Gospel: "The good shepherd is ready to give his life for his sheep."

When he reached the Place de la Bastille he requested the colonel in command to order his soldiers to cease fire. The order was transmitted, and soon the shots died down on both sides. The Archbishop advanced towards the barricade which

blocked the street. A member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society went with him, waving a white handkerchief tied to the end of a stick.

The Archbishop was able to slip past the barricade by entering a shop which had two doors, one on each side of it. He advanced alone towards the rebels, wearing his purple cassock and pectoral cross and carrying in his hand a written pardon for the proletariat army he had obtained from General Cavaignac, who was in command of the military forces in Paris.

The unexpected appearance of so exalted a personage at such a moment made a great impression on the insurgents, several of whom came up towards him in a conciliatory mood. He had begun to parley with them when a single shot rang out, followed instantly by a hail of bullets.

The Archbishop fell mortally wounded, exclaiming to a workman who supported him in his arms: "At least let my blood be the last which you shed."

The wish of the heroic Archbishop was granted. The revolution, after this act of self-sacrifice, came to an end. This did not prevent many from seeing clearly how far the Church still was from the hearts of a rebellious and avenging democracy.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE EVENING OF HIS DAYS

OZANAM had for some time been in poor health. He was suffering from nervous exhaustion and the strain of overwork. In 1851 he came to London to see the International Exhibition. On his return to France he stopped at Dieppe. The doctors advised a complete rest. Against their advice he returned after a few days to Paris, and took up his lectures again at the Sorbonne. "I have a duty to fulfil," he said. "What would be said of a soldier who through fear of death refused to take his place in the firing line?" Towards the Easter of 1852, however, he was obliged to take to his bed.

When the students came back to the Sorbonne after the Easter vacation they found a notice pinned near the entrance to the University. Professor Ozanam's lectures had been temporarily suspended. An expression of disappointment appeared on many of their faces. Then one of them thoughtlessly burst out: "These professors only

think of their own convenience. They seem to think themselves free to break off their lectures at any moment, as though they were not paid to do their work."

This remark was imprudently repeated to Ozanam, who was in bed with a high fever. He was deeply hurt. He had been wounded on one of the points on which he was most sensitive—the exact fulfilment of his duties. "I have a lecture already prepared," he exclaimed. "I shall deliver it. We must honour our profession."

In spite of his wife's remonstrances and tears he got up. When he reached the Sorbonne he was as pale as a ghost. Leaning heavily on the arm of a friend he walked across the lecture hall and mounted the dais. His pupils, who were not expecting him, quickly filled the room and burst into thunderous applause. Requesting a moment's silence, Ozanam spoke as follows:

"Gentlemen, our century is accused of being a self-seeking one. It is even asserted that we professors are suffering from the same malady. Instead of that it is in these very halls that we wear out our strength and undermine our health. For my part I do not complain of this. Our lives belong to you. We are ready to give them to you even to our last breath. As far as I myself am concerned, if I die it shall be in your service."

He then delivered his lecture with undiminished

fire and eloquence. But it was the last he was ever to give. The students had a gloomy foreboding of this as they crowded round his chair. "You were marvellous to-day, sir." "Yes," answered Ozanam, "but to-night I shall not sleep a wink."

He never returned to the lecture hall again.

He spent the autumn in the south of France, and then went back to Tuscany to die. In January, 1853, he took ship from Genoa to Leghorn and settled down at Pisa in the hope that the mild climate of the Tuscan seaboard might restore his shattered health.

Unfortunately the winter that year was exceptionally wet. "You have doubtless heard," he writes to a friend, "of my journeyings by land and sea, and of my arrival finally at Pisa. . . . You will picture to yourself no doubt from a distance that the traveller has been leading a life of pleasure under a cloudless sky. Alas! you are very wide of the mark. Of all those incidents from Sacred History painted by Benozzo Gozzoli on the walls of the Campo Santo of Pisa, I have beheld one only—the Deluge. For forty days we have been drenched in continual rain, turning sometimes into sleet, blown hither and thither by violent winds."

On Easter Tuesday, writing to another friend, he quotes with a touch of humour the well-known lines from Dante's "Inferno":

“Lo sono al terzo cerchio della piovà  
 Eterna, maledetta, fredda, greve;  
 Regola e qualità mai non l'è nuova.” \*

Disappointed at the inclement weather at Pisa, he decided to move to a hamlet in the country. At the beginning of June he took a villa at Antignano, a village charmingly situated on the sea-coast a few miles out of Leghorn. On the hill of Montenero, overlooking the village, is a sanctuary to Our Lady which for many a year has been like a lighthouse of faith and hope to mariners out at sea. Ozanam must certainly have climbed up there and spent some time in prayer at Our Lady's shrine. Before definitely settling down, however, at Antignano, Ozanam paid a last flying visit to the Conferences of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, which were already in existence in several towns of the old Granduchy of Tuscany—at Leghorn, Florence, Pontedera, Prato and Siena.

Those were the last years of a dynasty over which a sword of Damocles was hanging. Leopold II of Hapsburg Lorraine, the last Grand Duke of Tuscany—“Canapone,” as he was disrespectfully dubbed by his rebellious subjects—had returned to his little kingdom when the revolution of 1848 was over and done. A decade later, however, Tuscany was annexed by Victor Emanuel II of

\* “In the third circle I arrive, of showers  
 Ceaseless, accursed, heavy and cold, unchanged  
 For ever, both in kind and in degree.”



Savoy. Soon after the capital of the new kingdom of Italy was transferred from Turin to Florence, as a preparatory step towards the eventual choice of Rome.

Ozanam, however, was now but little interested in the astounding political changes which were shortly to take place in Italy. All his thoughts were fixed on the hereafter. The hours slipped quickly by at Antignano. He spent much time in prayer and frequently went for strolls along the seashore. But his health was undermined and past repair. He was reduced almost to a walking skeleton.

He knew now that he would never recover. On his last birthday he wrote the following words :

"I know that to-day I enter on my fortieth year. I have already passed more than half-way across the stage of life. I know likewise that I have a young and beloved wife, a dear daughter, splendid brothers, a second mother, many friends, a highly respected career, and have published several volumes of studies which I have brought exactly to that point in which they ought to serve as the basis of a greater work which I have long hoped to be able to accomplish. Nevertheless here I am stricken down by a malady which is all the more dangerous in so much as it will probably lead to a complete breakdown. Must I then abandon all these treasures which Thou, O God, hast granted me? Why wilt Thou not be satisfied, O Lord, with

a partial sacrifice? Which of those things to which I am too tenaciously attached must I give up? Wouldst Thou not be content with the sacrifice of my literary self-esteem, of my ambitions regarding my career, of my plans of study, in which perchance there is a greater admixture of pride than of zeal for truth? If I were to sell one half of my books and bestow the money on the poor, and then, limiting myself simply to the strict fulfilment of my professional duties, were to dedicate my remaining years to visiting the poor, and instructing the young and soldiers, wouldst Thou, O Lord, be satisfied? Wouldst Thou leave me the consolation of growing old in the company of my wife and completing the education of my child?

“But perhaps, my God, Thou dost not wish this! Thou art not willing to accept these self-interested offers, Thou spurnest the sacrifices I am ready to make. What must I do? It is written in the beginning of the Book that I must do Thy will. And I answer Thee: O Lord, I come. I am coming if Thou callest me, for I have no right to complain. Thou hast granted me forty years of life. My relatives therefore should not take umbrage if Thou workest no miracle to cure me. At the outset of my career, when I was suffering from an affliction of the throat, didst Thou not cure me? And then, five years ago, didst Thou not restore me to health after a very serious illness, and hast Thou not allowed me this fresh lease of life

in order that I might do penance for my sins and become better? All the prayers which at that time were lifted up for me were hearkened to. Why is it that to-day those much more numerous prayers which are raised are lost? But perhaps, O Lord, Thou wilt hearken to them in another manner. Thou wilt grant me courage, resignation, peace of soul and those ineffable consolations which are felt when Thou art near. Thou intendest to turn my illness into a source of merit and of blessing, and these blessings will be showered down on the heads of my wife, and daughter, and all my dear ones, who will benefit more by my sufferings than they would have done by my work."

His strength was failing rapidly. In August he was scarcely able to walk in the garden of the villa. On the vigil of the Assumption he determined to pay a last visit to the church. Next morning he refused to take a carriage. "Perhaps," he said, "this will be the last time I shall go for a walk in this world. If so I wish to turn it into an act of homage to God and to His Mother." The peasant lads clustered round the church door doffed their caps respectfully. His pale, emaciated figure touched all hearts. The parish priest of Antignano by a strange coincidence was also ailing from an illness from which he was destined never to recover. Word was brought to him that Ozanam was in church. He insisted on getting out of bed, entered the church wearing his sacred vestments,

and, leaning for support on the arm of a server, gave communion to the distinguished writer. That was the last Mass at which Ozanam was present, and the final and closing act in the ministry of the aged parish priest.

## CHAPTER XIII

### DEATH

**F**REDERICK OZANAM remained scarcely a fortnight longer at Antignano in the company of his wife and small daughter, and of his two brothers, Alphonse and Charles, who had arrived in the meantime from France.

Sometimes he would take a short drive along the coast—perhaps to a point where an old tower, the “Torre Calafuria,” surrounded by a cluster of fishermen’s cottages, stands on a low-lying piece of rock jutting out to sea. The carriage would stop and the invalid alight and make his way with no little difficulty to a chair where he could rest quietly, looking out to sea.

Although it is impossible to determine the exact spot on the coast where Ozanam used to go and sit, it is easy enough to conjure up the scene. From time to time his ears would catch the splash of oars, and he would catch sight of a boatload of strong-limbed, broad-backed fisherfolk slowly passing round the rocks below. In the distance on a clear day he would catch a glimpse of the twin islands of

the Capraia and the Gorgona, the summits of two submarine mountains emerging to the surface of the water far out to sea. In his nostrils would be the acrid scent of the salt air, intermingled with the sweet odour of myrtles and thyme and wild broom.

His thoughts, however, were far away from these things. He was wrapt in contemplation like St. Monica and St. Augustine on the shore at Ostia. Once his elder brother, noticing his eyes were wet with tears, embraced him affectionately. "Cheer up, we shall soon return to France." "Oh, no, it is not that that troubles me. When I think of my sins, and of how much Christ suffered for them, I cannot hold back my tears." Another time his brother, seeing once more a tear in the corner of his eye, asked him: "But are you then so great a sinner?" "Do you realize," replied Frederick gravely, "how great is the sanctity of God?"

On August 31st they bade farewell to Antignano. Before leaving the villa Frederick wished to be carried to the bottom of the garden. He gave one last look around him, paused for an instant to drink in the beauty of the Tuscan countryside, then, raising his hat, exclaimed: "I thank Thee, O God, for all the troubles and sufferings Thou hast sent me in this house. Accept them, I pray Thee, in expiation of my sins."

The sick man was carried in a chair to the port of Leghorn, where he embarked on board the steamship *L'Industrie*. The voyage to Marseilles

was mercifully a smooth one. No sooner had he arrived there, however, than he was put straight to bed in his stepmother's house, since he was not in a fit condition to continue the journey to Paris.

Realizing that his end was fast approaching, he asked for the last sacraments. On September 8th, the Feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, he suddenly took a turn for the worse. With upraised arms he suddenly exclaimed: "My God, my God, have mercy on me." Nor did he ever speak again.

His brother Alphonse stood near the head of the bed, reciting the prayers for the dying. His wife and near relatives were on their knees in the death chamber. In the next room were a few members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. His breathing gradually became heavier and heavier. At ten minutes to eight it was all over. As the shades of evening began to gather his white spirit had already winged its way to meet its Maker.

PART IV  
THE SAVANT



## CHAPTER XIV

### OZANAM AS AN HISTORIAN

**A**FTER filling in the details of a picture it is only natural that a painter should lay brush and palette aside for a short while and step backwards to view his canvas from a distance. He will then be able to judge better how to put in those last finishing touches which will breathe life into his work.

The portrait has already been painted. The story of Frederick Ozanam's life has been told. The necessary background has been given—a knowledge, that is, of the times in which he lived. A brief survey of his work as a writer and as an historian has yet to be given in order to complete the picture.

Had Ozanam lived longer he would have carried into effect a project which he had cherished since boyhood. He would have written a monumental work on the benefits which have accrued to society from the influence of Christianity throughout the course of history. He had ever felt that it was his mission in life to rebut the unjust accusations of those historians, numerous enough in his

days, who were so foolish as to attempt to prove that the Catholic Church was the sworn enemy of human progress and development—a dead weight impeding the upward march of mankind towards higher types of civilization.

No! In opposition to writers of this type Ozanam maintained that true civilization and Catholicity are synonymous terms. Before the light of Christianity began to shine, there existed in the Ancient World only imperfect types of civilization. Since then, outside the radius of influence of Christianity are only to be found either the negation or the gradual decomposition of civilization. Should the modern world attempt to break away from Christianity, far from involving an upward march of mankind towards a higher type of civilization, this would mean rather a slow and gradual return towards the barbarism and paganism of past ages.

This is fundamentally the thesis of every Catholic historian. It was brilliantly defended during Ozanam's lifetime by a great Catholic writer of whom we shall speak anon, Alessandro Manzoni. It has been splendidly developed since his death by another most distinguished Catholic historian and economist—all too little known amongst English-speaking Catholics—Giuseppe Toniolo.

Ozanam's untimely death prevented him from putting into execution the project he had in mind. Something on the same lines was done during his lifetime by a distinguished and learned

contemporary, Cesare Cantù. A Lombard, living in Milan, the city in which Ozanam was born, Cantù was one of the most eminent Catholic writers of his generation in Italy. He compiled a "Compendio della Storia Universale" in several volumes.

Had Ozanam lived longer he would have done the same—and would have done it better than Cantù. For, though the latter was no mean historian, he did not possess the literary gifts of Ozanam.

Ozanam's reputation as an historian rests, then, only on a few fragments of the great monument to the glory of God and of the Church which he had hoped some day to be able to build. Solid blocks of masonry which will resist the ravages of time. Finished pieces of sculpture which charm the eye of the connoisseur. These fragments resemble a fine pedestal to a monument which the architect has not yet been able to complete.

The most important of Ozanam's published works are the following: "*The History of Civilization during the Vth Century*"; "*The Christian Civilization of the Franks*"; "*The Franciscan Poets of Italy during the XIIIth Century*"; "*Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the XIIIth Century.*"

A brief survey of the first two publications will give a deeper insight into the workings of the mind of their author. With the two latter we shall deal in due course.

"*The History of Civilization during the Vth Century*" contains some of Ozanam's lectures

as they were taken down by a stenographer in the lecture hall at the Sorbonne. The volume was published posthumously. The following words are quoted from the author's preface :

"While in the first flush of youth the historian Gibbon visited Eternal Rome. As he was wandering on the Capitol, pondering over the vanished glories of the past, the silence was suddenly broken by the sound of a religious chant, and he beheld a long procession of Franciscans emerging from the Basilica of Ara Coeli—treading with their sandalled feet the path along which so many triumphal conquerors had passed. He was filled with indignation and forthwith planned to write 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire' in vindication of classical antiquity thus outraged by Christian barbarism.

"I too have watched the friars of Ara Coeli walking over the stones of the Capitol. I saw in this sight the symbol of the victory of love over force, and resolved to write of the progress of mankind during that epoch in which the English historian saw nothing but decadence. . . ."

In the fifth century it seemed as though civilization was going to cave in. In reality, as Ozanam pointed out, two different types of civilization stood face to face, the pagan and the Christian, each with its own literature and code of laws. The aftermath of paganism still survived in the habits and customs of the old Roman world. Men no longer believed in the Gods, but they had

followed their example too long readily to relinquish their worship. Gladiatorial shows still continued to provide an outlet for the instinct of brutality embedded in the heart of man. Poets and writers fawned on a populace composed of men and women of every race almost except the ancient Romans. The popular idols of the day succeeded each other in swift succession on the throne of the Cæsars.

It was Ozanam's purpose to show the influence of Christianity on this old Roman world which was determined to go down to its death with a jest on its lips.

Ozanam dealt at some length with the influence of Christianity on Roman law and literature. He showed how theology had corrected mistaken pagan and heretical ideas, how the papacy had withstood the onslaught of the barbarian invasions, and how in the silence of the cloister the culture of the Ancient World had been preserved. He pointed out the tendency of Christianity to raise up out of their former abject condition the slaves and labouring classes. Womanhood, too, was invested a new sense of dignity as a result of higher conception of the sanctity of marriage.

Ozanam concludes this study of civilization during the fifth century with the following reflections:

"When God intends to create a new world, little by little, very slowly, he grinds to powder the

old masonry which is bound to collapse and begins in the meantime to construct the modern building which will take its place. In the same way in which behind the ramparts of a besieged city new walls are slowly raised, against which the enemy will fling themselves in vain, so in good time, while the battlements of the old Roman civilization were crumbling to dust, a new line of Christian fortifications was being built, behind which society might safely take refuge. This spectacle should be an example and a lesson to us. Certainly the invasion of the Roman Empire by the barbarisms was the most complete and formidable revolution which the world has ever seen. And yet we can see what infinite care God took to deaden the blow and prevent the Ancient World from decomposing too quickly. Let us trust that our own era may be no less fortunate, and that if in our own days also old walls are breaking down, new and more solid ones will be built in their place, so that civilization which has cost both God and man so much may not perish."

In this first volume Ozanam describes the death agony of the Ancient World. His second book, "The Christian Civilization of the Franks," deals with the heirs of imperial Rome. "It is time now," he writes, "to show how Christianity was able to accomplish what the wisdom of the Cæsars had been unable to achieve. Little by little while Ancient Rome was losing battles and territory, while she was slowly

consuming and exhausting her riches, her army and her might in the hopeless struggle against the barbarian invaders, a new Rome was gaining ground. She was entirely spiritual. Her power rested only in thoughts and in words. She lay in wait for the barbarian hordes pressing at the frontiers of the Empire in order that she might master them when they swept all before them. She even penetrated into their own fastnesses, into the heart of Germany, and sought out those wild tribes which had remained in their own homes. While the Goths, Vandals and Lombards fell a prey to Arianism, which was ultimately the cause of their ruin, the Franks embraced the true faith. From that moment the cycle of invasions came to a standstill. The heritage of the Roman Empire had passed into their hands."

"The Christian Civilization of the Franks" is the history of the astonishing transformation of the barbarian tribes that over-ran the ancient Roman Empire. At the hands of the Church these wild tribesmen were transformed into the Christian nations of the Middle Ages.

By what means? By the Popes, by the bishops, by the monks. New moral values were given to peoples who heretofore had worshipped violence only and brute force. The Church taught that the seat of authority lay not in the might of the sword, but in God alone. She recognized no inherent rights in any prince or chieftain, but only powers delegated from God. The Sovereign Pontiff himself

claimed no other title than that of God's Vicar on earth.

The barbarian invaders followed blindly chieftains whom they knew, whose power lay in their own physical strength and in the might of their swords. They came into contact with the Christian populations living within the boundaries of the Empire, and found men obeying an invisible leader who lived in a city far away—an old man whose strength lay entirely in the moral sway which he exercised over his subjects.

The struggle between the moral power of the papacy and the brute strength of the barbarian chieftains who had conquered the Ancient Roman World was a long-drawn-out and protracted one. During that struggle the new nations received their political education. Their rulers learned that they were no longer, like the Emperors of pagan Rome, above the law. They learned that the moral law of God held good equally for them as it did for the lowliest of their subjects, that they must respect the sanctity of the marriage bond, the lives of their subjects and must keep to their contracts.

The Popes of those early centuries were greatly aided in the civilizing influence which they exercised over the Germanic tribes by the bishops and the monks. In the former the barbarian hordes beheld with wondering eyes peaceful rulers, clad not in armour, but in long flowing robes, holding in one hand a staff and in the other a book. They



saw how by their words they were able to sway the multitudes. The bishops were the servants of the poor and illiterate, but likewise the masters of those in high positions. / It was a new type of government based not on brute force, but on wisdom and virtue. The great monastic houses, too, were centres of culture. The light of civilization shone out from the cloisters. Within their precincts was preserved from destruction the heritage of Greco-Roman civilization. For miles around them land, formerly waste and barren, was tilled and cultivated.

Ozanam summarizes in the following paragraph this new phase in the history of western civilization :

"In the same way in which the Church took clay, sand and stones, and pouring out a blessing over these crude material objects transformed them into gargoyles and stained-glass windows, so likewise she made use of those things which lay near to her hand, the might of arms, the power of wealth and the ties of kinship, blended them together according to her own wishes and built up anew a fresh social structure after her own mind."

## CHAPTER XV

### OZANAM AND MANZONI

**I**N 1813 two events occurred in Milan both of which may be taken as indications of the Second Spring of Christian fervour which was to blossom forth after the devastating whirlwind of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars had passed by. Ozanam was born in the city and Manzoni also published there the most popular of his sacred hymns, "Il Natale."

Alessandro Manzoni was born in Milan some twenty years earlier than Ozanam. His influence on the Catholic intellectual revival in nineteenth-century Italy cannot be over-estimated. A distinguished Italian prelate, the late Cardinal Maffi, Archbishop of Pisa, saw fit not so very long ago to write two pastoral letters to the clergy of his diocese, taking as his subject the works of Manzoni. After Dante, Manzoni is one of the greatest contributions which Italian Catholicity has made to the literature of the world.

Alessandro Manzoni belonged to an old family of landed gentry with estates in the north of Lombardy. His mother was the daughter of a

celebrated legal authority, Cesare Beccaria, the author of a book on the abolition of capital punishment which made a great stir at the end of the eighteenth century.

His youth was spent in Paris, where he lived alone with his mother, who was separated from her husband. At this date he formed an intimate acquaintance with Claude Fauriel, whom Ozanam knew later as a professor of foreign literature at the Sorbonne—and to whose chair in point of fact he eventually succeeded. Manzoni at this period of his life was imbued with the incredulous Voltairian spirit so prevalent in Paris at that date.

Shortly before Ozanam's birth, however, he returned to the Catholic faith of his childhood. Soon after he went back to live in Italy and remained there till his death in 1873.

The details of the psychological crisis through which he passed are only slightly known, since Manzoni himself was always most reserved when speaking on this subject. He had married the daughter of a Swiss banker, Henriette Blondel, a Protestant by religion. Three years after their marriage his wife was received into the Catholic Church. Her decision, taken only after mature consideration, awoke within his heart feelings which, in spite of his outward veneer of scepticism, must never at any time have been very deeply buried beneath the surface. He remained ever after till the end of his life a man of great spiritual depth.

Anxious to give some tangible proof of gratitude to God, he resolved henceforth to consecrate his pen to the defence of the first principles of Christianity and the vindication of the Catholic faith. This resolution was carried out. He became, in fact, one of the most outstanding Catholic writers of his age.

The first fruits of his religious fervour and literary activity are to be found in his "Sacred Hymns" on the Resurrection, Christmas, the Sacred Passion and Pentecost, published between 1812 and 1818. These are sparkling jewels of Catholic verse which will endure to the end of time. In place of the conventional, somewhat affected religious poetry of the eighteenth century he thus reintroduced into Italian literature the deep religious mysticism of the Middle Ages.

He defended very ably the same historical thesis as Ozanam in his "*Osservazioni sulla Morale Cattolica*"—a work written in refutation of certain unjust and anti-Catholic insinuations made by Sismondi in his "*History of the Italian Republics during the Middle Ages*."

"In a chapter in that book an attempt is made," writes Manzoni, "to prove that the moral teaching of the Catholic Church has exercised a baneful influence on the character of the people of Italy. I am firmly convinced that the moral teaching of the Church is the only sound and reasonable teaching. Whenever Her moral law is set aside, or wherever it is unknown, or wrongly

interpreted, moral corruption results as an inevitable consequence."

Manzoni defended the influence of the Church on society and on the lives of men above all in his great historical novel, "*I Promessi Sposi*." When passing through Milan, Sir Walter Scott once paid a visit to his great Italian contemporary. Tradition would have it that Manzoni modestly exclaimed that he owed all his fame as an historical novelist to the influence of Scott. In that case, promptly replied his distinguished visitor, "I shall always consider '*I Promessi Sposi*' as my great masterpiece."

It does not appear that Ozanam ever actually met Manzoni. Unlike Ozanam, Manzoni was never connected with the teaching staff of any university. His life was the quiet and uneventful one of a married man and a country gentleman with a town house in Milan.

The outlook of both writers, however, was identical. Men of learning and artists of the first rank, both were engaged in apologetics, using their very great talents in the defence of the outworks of the citadel of the Catholic doctrine. Both are shining examples of the Christian intellectual revival which broke out in western Europe after the raging tempest of unbelief, ushered in by the French Revolution, had spent its force.

## CHAPTER XVI

### OZANAM AND TONIOLO

OZANAM may be said practically to have ended his days in the district of Pisa. If he took ship from Leghorn during the last week of his life it was to die almost as soon as he landed on French soil in the port of Marseilles. It is in a professor at the University of Pisa, Giuseppe Toniolo\*—the great leader of the Catholic laity in Italy during the last years of the pontificate of Leo XIII and throughout that of Pius X—that the most striking counterpart to Ozanam is to be found.

Twenty-five years after Ozanam left Pisa on his last journey to Marseilles, Giuseppe Toniolo was nominated to the Chair of Political Economy at Pisa. His life resembles that of Ozanam to a striking degree. A Venetian of middle-class parentage, he took his degree in Law at the University of Padua in 1867. In obedience to his father's wishes he too, like Ozanam, entered the offices of a local solicitor. Owing to his father's sudden and unexpected death he found himself as a

\* "Giuseppe Toniolo." C.T.S. Price 2d.

young man in exactly the same position as Frederick Ozanam—an assistant lecturer at a provincial university, the sole support practically of his widowed mother and two brothers.

Toniolo had, however, like Ozanam a vocation—not to the priesthood, but to be a great lay champion of Christian apologetics. His work lay in the field of economics and sociology. He became the acknowledged master of Catholic social teaching in Italy in his generation and was, in fact, consulted on technical points by Leo XIII when that pontiff was engaged in drawing up the "*Rerum Novarum*."

An historian of no mean merit, in all his historical researches into the economic problems of past ages he lays stress on exactly the same thesis as Ozanam—the beneficial influence of the Church on the development of human society.

There are various ways of learning to know a man. One of the best perhaps is to let him speak for himself.

In 1896 a Eucharistic Congress was held at Orvieto—a city in Central Italy famous for its stately and magnificent cathedral. One of the principal speakers at the Congress was Giuseppe Toniolo.

During the journey to Orvieto certain words once dropped in his hearing by Cardinal Mermillod, Bishop of Geneva, had been constantly in Toniolo's thoughts. Alluding to the changing spirit of the times, that keen student of social problems had

once exclaimed: "This is not the twilight of a closing day which we are witnessing but rather the dawn of a sure and certain resurrection of Christian civilization."

After dwelling for a moment on the determined effort made by the Catholic laity in Italy in recent years to preserve the corner stones of Christian civilization, Toniolo spoke as follows: \*

"The theorists of the French Revolution laid it down as an axiom that mankind would advance ever upwards along the path of human progress. The Positivists of our own days explain that human society contains in its own organism the initial impulse which by a natural and logical process of evolution will carry it ever onward to higher stages of development.

"This theory of the continual progress of the human race is not supported, though, by the facts of history.

"Outside the radius of influence of Christianity, as we know full well, nations and peoples, having grown at last to their full stature, have been fully conscious indeed of an inevitable decline and of approaching ruin, but never of continual and unlimited advance upwards along the path of human progress. The civilization of the Far East is distinguishable to this day from that of the western world, lit up by the lamp of Christ, precisely by an

\* E. M. Spreafico. "I discorsi encaristici di G. Toniolo. Rome, 1922."



absence of all sense of growth and progress. For how many centuries has the ancient civilization of China remained stationary, incapable of advancing beyond a certain point ! The abject condition into which India fell ages ago from a most wise type of early civilization has actually been crystallized into a philosophical and religious article of belief : and two hundred million Indians, turning their backs on all life's most noble aspirations here below, under the influence of a transcendent pantheism, long simply for the extinction of their individual personalities and their eventual absorption in the Great Sea of Being. The Hellenic genius, with its creative power and acute sense of philosophical penetration, seemed destined indeed, never to lose the sense of that intrinsic superiority which made it call all other nations, not situated within its own borders nor sharing in its privileged culture, 'barbarians.' Once they had reached, however, the highest point of their development, symptoms of decay began to appear in the Greeks who had exercised such a civilizing influence over the rest of the world. Searching in vain for any internal force which might carry it further, that race started on the downhill grade, the final point of which was registered by Sallust when he wrote : "*Apud Graecos, fides, labor, virtus nulla sunt.*" No other people in pagan antiquity possessed such a clear and firm conviction of their providential, almost divine mission to rule the world as the Romans. But at a certain moment,

instead of the hope of further advance along the upward path of progress, a deadly fear crept into every heart—that of a swiftly approaching doom. The relentless hand of fate was felt by men of letters and philosophers, soldiers and lawyers, emperor and people. And it was this gloomy, terrible, universal conviction of a final and inevitable dissolution which rendered solemn, almost sublime, the death agony of Rome.

“The modern world has smashed with its own fists, demolished piece by piece, the fabric of civilization which, from Apostolic days right up to the culminating point of the Middle Ages, was slowly built up anew by Christianity. This modern world which has hastened to proclaim as a dogma the continual advance of mankind along the path of progress, which until yesterday was so elated by that fever of material development which assails every nation in our own times—to-day, owing to a just and terrible judgment of God, feels no longer that haughty sense of optimism which formerly foresaw no limits to the advancing march of civilization. A gloomy pessimism pervades literature, the arts, politics and science, a fear that the future may usher in with destructive fury an era of satanic nihilism and universal ruin. Truly on that day when man, presuming to have no further need of God, declared that he was sufficient to himself, he discovered that he was nothing and beheld the whole tissue of civilization, his so-

called handiwork, perishing at the touch of his fingers!

"No! The idea of the continuous advance of mankind along the path of progress is a Christian idea. And it is precisely on account of the light of this Christian idea which has become part and parcel of the conscience of mankind and which, though it may indeed grow dim, will never be extinguished, that—as we witness to-day the uprising of new generations with firmer faith in Christ openly proclaiming their need of the supernatural as the only force that can hold them back from the new abyss of barbarism opening beneath their feet—we are able to exclaim from the bottom of our hearts: This is in very truth the breaking of the dawn—a radiant dawn of resurrection."

Listening to this inspiring address of Giuseppe Toniolo one seems to catch an echo of the impassioned eloquence of Frederick Ozanam in the lecture halls of the Sorbonne.

As university lecturers they both had much in common. They both spent the same painstaking labour preparing beforehand what they had to say. Once in the lecture hall they both handled their subject in such a clear and attractive way that the room was always crowded and many who held views diametrically opposed to theirs went to listen to them, attracted by their clear thinking and tone of ardent conviction.

With his pupils at Pisa Toniolo was on the same

terms of friendly intimacy as was Ozanam in Paris. On his way back from the university he would be seen walking down the Lungarno, where the stately mansions still stand where Byron and Shelley once lived, surrounded by a troop of students whom he often invited to pass the evening at his house. He would explain to them some point in his lecture which they had not fully understood or discuss with them the events of the day. He encouraged them to express their own thoughts freely, and would intervene if the flow of conversation threatened to stray from the main point and lead it back there. At the right moment he knew how to let fall a word which would throw fresh light on a situation and encourage his listeners to pursue a generous line of conduct. He never attempted to fathom the consciences of his pupils, and in consequence they opened out their hearts to him spontaneously. The kindliness expressed in his features, words and gestures, which drew the hearts of others close to his, could only inspire feelings of veneration, affection, and trust in a man who always proved the most tactful, benevolent and paternal of friends.

Professor Toniolo was an active member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. He used to call charity the "synthesis of all the virtues." And in this sense he understood and practised it. In the indigent he saw persons in need, not merely of material but more particularly of moral help. It

was not so much the physical exterior of the poor man or woman that his eyes beheld, as the figure of Christ. His spiritual vision saw in the needy simply creatures of God. He approached them with a peculiar tenderness and spoke to them not as a man of learning but with simple words that came straight from his heart. How many moral derelicts did he not buoy up with fresh hope!

He put into practice in a true Franciscan spirit the gospel precept of bestowing on the poor whatever he did not actually need himself.

Finding on one occasion that he had two winter overcoats he immediately gave one away. Soon after a man just out of hospital called at his door shivering with cold. Toniolo gave him his other overcoat, keeping for himself only a light waterproof, beneath which he wore a knitted woollen jersey in order to keep warm.

Most tactful was he in manner when helping those in reduced circumstances. When unable to find any work for them he would ask them to copy his manuscripts or to put his papers in order, so as to be able to help them without wounding their feelings.

Toniolo was a true disciple of Ozanam—as a man of learning, as a teacher; even his home life as a married man and a father was very similiar to that of Ozanam. And his death too in Pisa in 1918 from overwork—after exhausting his strength phy-

sically and intellectually in the service of God, recalls pathetically those last few weeks spent by Ozanam in the neighbourhood of Pisa half a century earlier.

## CHAPTER XVII

### OZANAM AND ST. FRANCIS

IT is easy to realize how a man of Ozanam's disposition, with a heart overflowing with charity towards God and man, keenly sensitive to all that is beautiful and poetical in the Christian religion, should have caught fire when first brought into contact with St. Francis of Assisi. If there is an adjective more suitable than another to describe the soul of Ozanam it is this: Franciscan. He was in fact a member of the Third Order.

The intense love of St. Francis for the beauties of Nature. His compassion for the poor and suffering. The fact that he lived in an age not far distant from that of Dante with which Ozanam, owing to his historical studies, was closely acquainted. All these things served to attract Ozanam to St. Francis. The loving care and painstaking labour with which Ozanam attempted to learn all that he could about St. Francis and his early followers may be understood by turning to the most popular and widely read of his publications: "Franciscan Poets in Italy in the XIIth Century."

It is a collection of those touching popular legends which arose very early around the seraphic figure of St. Francis. Ozanam is careful to warn his readers that these legends are by no means matters of faith. "The sparkling drops of morning dew," he writes, "must not be confused with the striking colours of the morning sky which accompanies them."

In this collection of poems, however, the characteristic trait of all Ozanam's writings is apparent from the outstart—that of pointing out the solid Christian truths underlying these pious legends. "Do not accuse these 'Little Flowers,'" he writes, "of being childish. Although only little trifling flowers they spring out of a virile doctrine, made for free men. . . . You may, indeed, smile at the peace proclaimed by St. Francis between the city of Gubbio and the wolf of the neighbouring hills. But you will perceive underlying it all a wonderful lesson of Christian charity. Do you not understand that the wolf, guilty of theft and murder, who harkens to the words of St. Francis and, placing his paw in his hand, solemnly promises to abstain in future from harming anyone, represents the people of the Middle Ages? In moments of anger they were terrible, but the Church did not despair of educating them. She clasped in her divine hands those of the assassin and held them firmly until he had learned to feel an instinctive horror of deeds of blood—one of the greatest debts owed to Her by later ages."

Of that intense appreciation of all things of beauty



which was one of the salient characteristics of St. Francis, Ozanam writes as follows :

“ By drawing attention to the divine plan which governs the universe, Christianity alone, so often accused of being an enemy of Nature, has been able to teach mankind to really respect and love all things of beauty.

“ St. Francis viewed the created universe in this light. Throughout the ascending scale of created beings he sought for traces of God's handiwork. In things of beauty he caught a glimpse of the Author of all beauty. No object was too small or too insignificant to escape his notice. Remembering their common origin at the hands of the Almighty, he called all things his brothers and sisters. At peace with all things, he had returned, in a certain sense, to the state of primitive innocence. His heart overflowed with love not only for men, but for all things which fly in the air or crawl on the earth.

“ He loved the rocks and wooded glens, the nodding ears of corn, the vineyards and the mountain torrents, the earth, air, fire and winds, and exhorted them all to remain unsullied, to serve and pay honour to God. Where the eyes of others beheld only elusive and perishing things of beauty, he noticed the interconnection of the physical and the moral world, the analogy between the mysteries of Nature and of faith.”

The love of St. Francis for wild flowers and animals

may seem to our eyes carried almost to excess, but it was a reaction against the spirit of the times he lived in.

"In the Italy of the Middle Ages," continues Ozanam, "where civil strife and hatred was rife, what could be more effective than a horror of destruction carried to the extent of avoiding even treading on worms by the roadside? In an age which was disgraced by the fiendish cruelty of the Emperor Frederick II and of his henchman the bloodthirsty Ezzelino, in an age which witnessed the starvation of Count Ugolino and the butchery of the Sicilian Vespers, what gesture could be more eloquent than that of attempting to save even lambs from the slaughterhouse? This man who was so simple as to preach to birds and flowers was able to transform morally the Guelph and Ghibelline cities. Inviting the citizens of Padua, Brescia, Cremona and Bologna to assemble in the public squares, he began to preach to them by conveying to them a greeting of peace. Then he besought them to forget their grievances and to come to terms with their enemies. Those most bitterly opposed to peace, so it has been handed down, embraced each other, expressing their horror of bloodshed. Thus St. Francis of Assisi was like the Orpheus of the Middle Ages, charming the wild beasts and softening the hearts of men."

## CHAPTER XVIII

### OZANAM AND DANTE

**A**N essay was once written by one of the great German Dante scholars on "The Art of Misunderstanding Dante." Material for such a study has seldom been lacking.

In the sixteenth century Protestant reformers in England and Germany claimed Dante on the slenderest evidence as a forerunner; in the nineteenth century Professor Rossetti—the father of Dante Gabriel—sought to prove that Dante was a member of a secret, anti-papal, pseudo-masonic sect.

Working on this gratuitous assumption, he gave a fantastic anti-Catholic interpretation to the "Divine Comedy."

Nowadays no competent critic questions the orthodoxy of Dante's religious tenets. "Only the crudest dilettantism," writes Dr. Scartazzini, one of the most eminent of Dante scholars, "could doubt of his Catholicity. His dogma is strictly Catholic; we may safely affirm that Aquinas had no more faithful disciple."

It would seem logically to follow, therefore, that

Dante can best be understood and appreciated by those who have had a solid grounding in scholastic philosophy and thomistic theology. Hatred of the Catholic Church was at the bottom of the flippant sarcasm flung by Voltaire at Dante; lack of sympathy with Catholic doctrine often provides an explanation of why so many find "Hell" the only readable portion of the "Divine Comedy." Broadly speaking those most deeply penetrated with the spirit of Christianity have generally rated the "Purgatorio" and the "Paradiso" far higher than the "Inferno." A striking instance is furnished by the case of Ozanam.

"Dante," he writes in his book on "Dante and Catholic Philosophy in the XIIIth Century," "has had a most singular fate. The masterpiece which cost him so much labour, on which he spent practically his whole life, which has earned for him eternal fame, has lost for us after sixteen hundred years its philosophical value which is perhaps its chief merit. Many cultured people are acquainted only with the 'Inferno'—and of that know little more than the inscription written over the gate of Hell and the episode of the death of Count Ugolino. Whereas the poet who sang of the calm self-controlled sufferings of the souls in Purgatory, who painted radiant visions of Paradise, seems to them a sinister spirit, a kind of bōgey emerging out of the proverbial darkness of the benighted thirteenth century. Others like Voltaire, more learned but no more

just, see in the 'Divine Comedy' only a strange creation of a man of genius who in certain descriptive passages soars far above the depraved tastes of his era, notwithstanding the unfortunate choice of his subject. Some modern critics have discerned only a neurotic pseudo-religious sentiment, others a political creed inspired by a deep-seated feeling of rancour. For all these people the frequent allusions to Catholic dogma in every canto of the poem seem like the weeds of the intellectual thought of his time which crop up everywhere. . . .

"Nevertheless it was to the minds of level-headed, thinking men that the poet, turning momentarily aside from the main theme of his story, painfully conscious that he would be often misunderstood, made this passionate appeal :

"O voi che avete gl'intelletti sani,  
Mirate la dottrina che s'asconde  
Sotto il velame delli versi strani !"

"My purpose has been to draw attention to the philosophical ideas of Dante (the doctrine concealed under the close texture of the mystic strain) to the Scholastic Philosophy of the Middle Ages which is despised because it is unknown, and unknown again because it is veiwed with contempt. . . ."

\* "Ye of intellect  
Sound and entire, mark well the lore concealed  
Under close texture of the mystic strain."

"Hell," ix, 6, 7. Carey's translation.

Ozanam closes his study with these words, which bring out even more clearly his point of view :

"The Holy Roman Empire no longer exists. The causes of strife within the Italian republics of the Middle Ages have vanished. The voices of the great doctors of Scholastic Philosophy have remained silent for many a long year. Navigators have explored those distant seas the thought of which once engendered in the hearts of men a superstitious fear, and have discovered there not the mountain of Purgatory, with its mysterious inhabitants, but shores where dwell other races similiar to our own. By means of the telescope men have explored the heavens. Those mysterious moving spheres which were supposed once to rotate around us have vanished from the minds of men. All those political and scientific interests in the poetry of Dante which gave pleasure to the men of his own generation have gone. His work would have no other value than that simply of an historical document, mirroring the spirit of the times in which he lived, had it not another interest which the passage of time can never destroy.

"The mystery of death which haunted the minds of men in his day has not ceased to interest us, nor has fresh light been thrown on it since the advent of Christianity. It fired the imagination of our distant ancestors, and to-day it fascinates to an equal degree our maturer, better informed minds.

Human intellect will ever strive to probe this mystery. It remains of vital interest although so much of the wisdom of those early centuries has been swept away to make place for new discoveries. The new knowledge which we owe to Columbus and to Copernicus has not yet overshadowed it. For in the same way in which these two master minds, by revealing the shape and position in the universe of the earth, have fixed for ever certain points of scientific knowledge, and have left an opportunity only to make certain minor discoveries to future astronomers and navigators, so too Catholicity, once having made known the relations existing between God and man, has revealed for ever the nature of the moral universe. It leaves no scope for the future discovery of new worlds and new skies, at most only offering a possibility of discovering minor truths, logically derived from those it has given to mankind."

What attracted Ozanam to Dante was therefore above all his Catholicity. In the "Divine Comedy" he found preserved in flawless verse the finest product of the Catholic thought of the Middle Ages—the theology of St. Thomas Aquinas.

It is not every student of Dante who is able to enter into such close contact with the mind of the master. Some there are, however, in every age who are led through Dante to the Church.

A striking example is to be found in the case of Giosuè Borsi, one of the most noteworthy of recent

Italian converts to the Catholic Church, who was killed in action during the Great War in 1915.

His conversion is the more worthy of notice here inasmuch as he came from the same district of Pisa and Leghorn where Frederick Ozanam passed the last months of his life on this earth.

Exactly thirty-five years after Ozanam set sail from Leghorn on his last journey to Marseilles, Giosuè Borsi was born in that bustling seaport on the Tuscan coast. His father was the editor of a local paper and a close friend of the notorious Italian poet and mason, Carducci, one of the most venomous enemies in his day of the Church in Italy. Giosuè's boyhood was spent amidst that same scenery and amongst those surroundings on which Ozanam's dying eyes had rested. How often as a full-blooded youth bubbling over with high spirits he must have sped along that same stretch of road, leading from Leghorn to Antignano, along which Ozanam took his last carriage drives !

As a boy he had shown unusual familiarity with the Italian classics, his favourite author being Ariosto. About the time that he first went as a student to the University of Pisa, the charm of the Court Poet of Ferrara began to pale before the deeper fascination of Dante. This was simply an outward expression of the internal change taking place in his character.

When composing the "*Orlando Furioso*," Ariosto had indeed no higher aim in view than that of



giving æsthetic delight to the high-born dames and noble youths who thronged the princely courts of the Italian Renaissance. Dante in the "*Divina Commedia*" was animated by a more spiritual purpose, that of showing how the fallen race of man, emerging from the gloomy forest of sin near the mouth of hell, might reach eventually the final goal of the human soul—that of infinite bliss caused by the contemplation of the Beatific Vision in Paradise.

This was the lesson which Borsi learned from Dante. In order to understand the great national poet of Italy he was obliged to study Catholic dogma.

His interest in Dante lead him to read books on Catholic apologetics. It was in fact to Dante that he owed in part his return to the fold.

This was the immense debt of gratitude which caused him to prize the "*Divine Comedy*" above all other works of literature.

In July, 1914, Borsi made his general confession at the feet of Father Alfani, the well-known Florentine astronomer and seismologist; and in April, 1915, he was confirmed by Cardinal Maffi, Archbishop of Pisa.

The passionate cult of Dante remained with him to the end. Twice was he invited by Professor Isidoro del Lungo to read and comment on a canto of the "*Divine Comedy*" in the rooms of the Florentine Dante Society at Orsanmichele—an

honour greatly coveted by Dante students. For our present purpose, however, one other instance of his devotion to Dante will suffice.

Gualtiero Tumiati, an Italian poet whose return to the faith of his childhood was largely due to Borsi's influence and example, has described their first meeting on the train to Syracuse, where both were taking important parts in the Greek play staged in the ancient amphitheatre.

"The train sped down the coast of Sicily. We were alone in the carriage. Twilight had fallen. A pale half moon had risen in the sky. Through the open windows were visible the foaming waves lashing the rocks round the dark entrance into the cavern of the Cyclops. How well I remember his joyful exuberant spirits as he ran from one window to the other, laughing, singing, reciting verses from Homer.

"'Oh, keep quiet . . . just for one minute!' I burst out, smiling myself.

"Then he sat down obediently on the opposite seat, drawing from his pocket a little book—how often was I to notice that volume in his hands afterwards!—his beloved Dante, which he invariably carried with him everywhere he went. And then, in spite of the rattling of the train, he read aloud to me a canto from the 'Paradise'—his favourite canto, that describing the beautiful vision of God. His voice, his manner, the agonized contraction of his features, showed plainly that the

words issuing from his mouth found an echo deep down in his heart.

"I was astonished and deeply moved. When he had concluded it seemed to me that the Heaven about which he had been reading still stood wide open above our heads. We both remained silent for some time. I was unable to remove my eyes from his face, on which a pale reflection of the luminous splendour of paradise seemed already to be shining. At last I gasped: 'You don't believe, surely, in Christianity?'"

"The joyous, triumphant ring of his voice still re-echoes in my ears as he answered proudly: 'I am a Catholic.' His gesture, as he raised his handsome face towards me, indicated his readiness to defend, if needs be, against all the world his new-found faith."

Giosuè Borsi, like Ozanam, was fascinated by Dante. They both felt that the message of Dante to the world has been to teach mankind, through the medium of poetry, the Catholic intellectual outlook.

## CHAPTER XIX

### OZANAM A LEADER OF CATHOLIC ACTION

WE have stepped back to view the canvas from some considerable distance. After first painting the portrait of Frederick Ozanam against the background of the times in which he lived, we shall now be able to insert the picture in a suitable frame in which it will stand out in bold relief—that of the history of Catholic Action throughout the centuries.

Catholic Action in the widest sense of the term, as H.H. Pius XI has pointed out, is as old as the Church itself. From the very earliest times supplementary organizations have been formed in order to extend the radius of her influence on society. At different periods of history though the influence of the Church on society has been exercised in different ways.

In apostolic times the deacons were created in order to free the apostles from certain minor duties. This was a supplementary organization adapted to the special needs of the times in the early Christian communities at Jerusalem, Antioch and elsewhere.

So too a few centuries later, when the old civilization of Greece and Rome was cracking and giving way beneath the onslaught of the barbarian invaders, a new organization arose to assist the Church in her mission of civilizing the world. Owing to the influence in particular of St. Benedict, the early monks and hermits were beginning to band themselves together and to live under the same roof. Ozanam was never tired of pointing out what a valuable asset to civilization in those far-distant days the early monastic houses were.

A few centuries later Christian civilization was once more threatened with extinction. The challenge to the Cross came this time from the Crescent. The form which Catholic Action took, in those days of ceaseless warfare against the Turk, was the creation of great military religious orders, such as the Knights of Malta.

Once the peril to the very existence of Christendom, first from barbarian invaders from the north, then from the Saracens from the south-east, had been averted, Catholic Action took a new form. The Church was free to turn her whole attention to building up the Christian civilization of the Middle Ages.

Europe, in Catholic countries at least, still remained nominally Christian right up to the time of the French Revolution. Whatever reservations be made concerning the particular governments of one country or another, or concerning individual

sovereigns and their cabinets and ministers, the fact remains that until the outbreak of the French Revolution the framework of European society, officially at least, still remained Christian.

The French Revolution swept all this away by proclaiming the dogma that religion is simply a matter of private opinion and no concern whatsoever of the State. The century in which Ozanam lived was one in which the separation was proclaimed in one country in Europe after another, of Church from State.

Ozanam never lived to see this programme fully carried out. He may have held views of his own about the alliance between the altar and the throne in nineteenth-century France. What he was afraid of was simply that the Church might become a tool in the hands of the Bourbon government of France. It was the shadow of Erastianism, in its diluted form of Gallicanism, which prompted him to action.

No one could have been more bitterly opposed than he to the product of nineteenth-century continental Liberalism—the creation, namely, of the Lay State. For if the Church is to be separated from the State, it follows logically that the State, no longer even nominally Christian, should be freed entirely from the influence of the Church.

In theory at least every department of the Lay State should logically be “purged” from religious influence. The catechism should no longer be taught in government schools, chaplains in the

army and navy should be suppressed, the symbols of the Christian faith removed from the Law Courts. The influence of religion would thus gradually be confined to what goes on inside the churches and to the privacy of the family circle.

It is to counteract this modern tendency slowly to de-Christianize the world that Catholic Action in the modern sense of the term has arisen. The form which Catholic Action takes to-day is determined by the particular needs of our times and varies in different countries according to local conditions. Roughly speaking it may be said that Catholic Action is a movement which aims at preserving the Christian heritage of past ages—the foundation stones of European civilization. It broadens out into a bold attempt to recapture the modern world for Christ.

In the history of this movement, which has slowly been gathering force during the last hundred years in the Catholic countries of Europe, the name of Ozanam, as a champion of Christian idealism, has every right to figure beside those of De Maistre, Montalembert and Lacordaire in France, of Balmès and Donoso Cortes in Spain, of Balbo, Rosmini and Manzoni in Italy.

The reconstruction of the intellectual life of Europe on Catholic lines was the guiding impulse of his life. He had no official connection with Catholic Action, in the sense that Professor Toniolo—the great leader of the Catholic laity in Italy—

had a generation later. And this for the simple reason that an organized force of Catholic Action, such has sprung up later in answer to the pressing needs of the times, did not exist in his day—even in Italy.

He deserves unquestionably, though, to be remembered as one of the forerunners of contemporary Catholic Action. His fine example as a lay apostle of Christ, in a university chair, has proved a source of inspiration to many others. It is enough here to mention three names—Giuseppe Toniolo, Contardo Ferrini and Ludovico Neechi.



PART V  
INFLUENCE OF OZANAM

## CHAPTER XX

### CHARACTER OF OZANAM

**F**REDERICK OZANAM'S place in the history of Catholic Action has been clearly indicated. Before taking the canvas from the easel and fitting it into its gilded frame, one or two finishing touches must be given to the portrait. In short, a word or two must be added on the most outstanding traits in Ozanam's character.

Sympathy appears at first sight to be the keynote of Ozanam's character—a quick and ready understanding of his fellow-men and a tender solicitude for the ill-starred and suffering. This in itself is certainly enough to create a most winning and attractive personality. The genuine sympathy which Ozanam felt for other men was, however, something much more than mere humanitarianism.

For him the whole created universe revolved round the central pivot of Divine Love. It was an impulse of pure unselfish love that first caused God to call the world into being. It was by a stupendous act of love again that God redeemed the world. The mystery of the Holy Trinity con-

stitutes the highest expression of Love—a boundless Love existing from all eternity between the three Persons in the God-head.

Ozanam had long meditated on these fundamental truths until they had penetrated into the very marrow of his bones. Small wonder that he should have radiated a glow of love and sympathy on all around him !

He had fully grasped the meaning of that Love of which St. Paul speaks in his First Epistle to the Corinthians. As a doughty champion of faith he extended this spirit of love even towards his opponents—endeavouring to understand their difficulties and, whenever possible, to spare their feelings. In his own day and generation his words consequently did not pass entirely unheeded. For many, whose minds were closed to the force of his reasoning, were touched by his ready gift of sympathy.

The services of Ozanam to the Catholic cause as a scholar and a writer are appreciated only by a small minority of those to whom his name is a household word. The afterglow, though, of that burning spirit of charity which led him to found the St. Vincent de Paul Society is ever with us after the lapse of over half a century since his death.

Turning his wondering gaze upwards towards the highest point of Paradise, Dante in his celestial vision caught a fleeting glimpse of that Divine

Love "that moves the sun in heaven and all the stars." In the same way Ozanam had had a momentary perception of the Spirit of Love which dwells at the back of the universe. A reflection from that Divine Light, on which his eyes had rested, shone ever afterwards on his countenance.

Others in their turn have caught from Ozanam a reflected ray of the Light of the Love of God. For Ozanam lit a lamp of charity in this world the flame of which has shone with increasing brilliancy ever since. This lamp of charity is the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and how that tiny flickering flame was first lit has been told in these pages. Year by year it has gathered fresh strength and continued to light up the dark places of the world.

It would not be possible to give a detailed account of the various stages in the development of the St. Vincent de Paul Society during the hundred years which have elapsed since its foundation. The Conferences which have sprung up in various centres all over the world have always acknowledged the authority of the Central Council in Paris. The first president of the Society was the Catholic newspaper editor who had sat in the chair at the first meeting of Ozanam and his student friends, and encouraged them to persevere in the work they had taken up. The aged Monsieur Bailly was succeeded in 1844 by Jules Gassin,

whose place as president was taken in 1847 by Adolphe Baudon.

Shortly after Ozanam's death the Society sent a delegation of four hundred members to Rome. This was in 1854, the year in which Pius IX promulgated the dogma of the Immaculate Conception. The following statistics are quoted from the report read during an audience granted them by the Pope. There were then in existence 1532 Conferences of the St. Vincent de Paul Society. They had been established in twenty-nine different countries. In France and her colonies alone there were 889. In Germany there were 160, in Belgium 148, in the British Isles 80, in Italy 78. Conferences had been formed in the East—in Egypt and Turkey. In the New World also Conferences had been established in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

When this report was read to him, Pius IX was deeply moved. Times indeed were out of joint, but this news was comforting to the heart of the Sovereign Pontiff. Rising from his chair he exclaimed: "My children, you are crusaders of Christ in a world which will listen no longer to sermons, nor heed the words of the priests. But it will still hearken to the voice of charity. Go forth and conquer the world by means of your love for the poor."

The fiftieth anniversary of the foundation of the St. Vincent de Paul Society was celebrated in the cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris by a

solemn religious service. The most distinguished Dominican preacher of the day, Fr. Monsabré, was in the pulpit. He gave the following account in the course of his sermon of the work being done by the Society.

"Your first thought was simply to visit the dwellings of the poor. Once having come into direct contact, though, with dire poverty, the spirit of charity which burned within you was not content with this alone. As I turn over the pages of the history of your Society during the past half-century, what do I see? An account of the adoption and upbringing of orphans, of protection accorded to destitute waifs, of schools opened for chimney sweeps and apprentices, of help given to prisoners released from jail. You have made free gifts of clothes and linen, opened cheap restaurants, given medical attention and legal advice. You have formed lending libraries, built schools and given catechetical instruction. In a word you have taken an interest in every aspect of the lives of your poor people—in their families, homes, work, business affairs, marriages, illnesses, deaths and funerals. Is there anything that has escaped your notice?"

If these words rang true when they were pronounced in the spacious nave of Notre Dame some fifty years ago, how much more would they do so were they to be repeated there to-day! It is safe to say that there is no country in the civilised world

to-day where the St. Vincent de Paul Society is not carrying on its work.

Yet if we search through the annals of the St. Vincent de Paul Society we shall look in vain for an account of the work done when Ozanam was president.

Although living in Paris, Frederick Ozanam steadfastly refused ever to allow himself to be elected president of the Society. Surely a striking instance of humility and an added proof—if such were needed—of single-hearted devotion to the cause he had at heart! A man of meaner stature or of coarser fibre would have attempted to make use of the Society as a means of personal aggrandizement. Ozanam was too high-minded for that. This brings us to the second distinguishing trait in his character—his modesty and spirit of self-effacement.

How often during the frequent visits that he paid to Tuscany must Ozanam have seen the black-hooded figures of the members of the "Misericordie"—the medieval burial confraternities—passing along the streets of Pisa, Florence and Siena! And how aptly do those black-hooded figures serve as a symbol of this facet of his character!

A group of some seven or eight men hasten by. They are carrying a coffin of some poor person to the church to receive the last blessing, or perhaps it is a stretcher on which lies some poor sick woman

whom they are taking to the nearest hospital. But who are they? Who is carrying that coffin? Passers-by are at a loss to tell, for the bearers are completely hidden from sight by their long black flowing robes. It may be that they are men of rank and station, small shopkeepers or rough workmen—members of the confraternity; that is all that can be known about them. For their faces are completely concealed from view by their hoods. Two narrow slits in the coarse black cloth enable them to use their eyes and thus fulfil their errand of mercy. The crowd hanging round the pavement in the street sees no more than that; the charitable act itself, not the person who performs it.

The flame of charity and zeal which burned in Ozanam's heart was of the same pure quality as that which filled the souls of the honest burghers of the mediæval Tuscan republics and led them to choose for the members of the "*Misericordie*" this distinctive dress, enabling them to perform their duties without attracting attention to their own persons, and which has been preserved throughout the centuries down to our own times.

Precisely on account of these two traits in Ozanam's character—his charity and humility—his name will never fade entirely from the minds of men. For, whatever far-reaching changes the future may have in store for the world, sympathy for others and singleness of purpose will ever be understood and appreciated by all honest-minded men.



Much light is thrown on Ozanam's character by his letters, from which we have quoted freely in the course of this short biographical sketch. Another valuable source of information which will help us to understand his inner life is his last will and testament. This was written at Pisa on his fortieth birthday, on April 23rd, 1853. This document sets an official seal, so to speak, on all that has been said so far about the nobility of his character.

"In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost . . . I commit my soul into the keeping of Jesus Christ my Saviour, in fear and trembling at the thought of my sins, trusting nevertheless in His boundless mercy. I die a member of the Catholic, Apostolic and Roman Church. I have known the restless, questioning spirit of the times, but have been firmly convinced all my life that there is no true haven of rest for mind and heart except within the Church and in subjection to her authority. If there be any merit in my writings, let this give me the right to beg all those whom I love to remain always faithful to a religion in which I have found light and peace. The last request which I make to my family, to my wife and daughter and to all their descendants, is this: that they may always persevere in the faith, and this notwithstanding the humiliations, scandals and desertions which they will witness. To my beloved Amelia, who has been the joy and

sunshine of my life, and whose tender care has consoled me during all my afflictions in the past year, I bid a last short farewell, as I do likewise to all earthly things. I thank her, bless her, and shall await her in Paradise. There alone I shall be able fully and worthily to requite her love. To my daughter I give my blessing, as did the ancient patriarchs, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. . . . I ask for the prayers of all my relatives, of the members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, and of my friends in Lyons. Pay no heed to those who will tell you, 'He is already in Heaven.' Pray rather without ceasing for one who has dearly loved you, but who has sinned grievously. Sustained by your dear prayers, my beloved friends, I shall leave this world with less apprehension. I trust firmly that we shall not be separated, but that I shall abide near you until you in your turn come to greet me. May the blessing of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost descend upon you all. Amen."

## CHAPTER XXI

### OBJECTS AND AIMS OF THE ST. VINCENT DE PAUL SOCIETY

THE following extract from the Report published by the Superior Council in England summarizes briefly the aims and objects of the Society :

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul is a society of men in all countries associated together for mutual encouragement in the practice of a Christian life. By taking an active part, however small, in the works of mercy, they hope to make progress in piety, and with this object they try to be friends of the poor, visiting and relieving them in distress, instructing them in religion, visiting workhouses, hospitals and similar institutions, distributing wholesome reading, conducting penny banks and libraries, and giving such kinds of help as may be most required. Mindful of their holy Patron's care for the young, they take a great interest in boys, and they try to benefit them by assisting in the conduct of their clubs, seeing that they attend

Catholic schools, obtaining suitable situations for them when they leave school, and supervising their attendance at Mass and Catechism. Many other works are undertaken by the Society, varying according to circumstances, but the above are universally needed and belong to its general practice. It is a primary rule that no work of charity is foreign to the Society.

Members are either Active or Honorary. An Active Member need not do more than attend the weekly conference meeting, at which there is a voluntary and strictly secret collection, and visit one poor family. As this need not occupy more than an hour a week, no great demand is made upon his time, while he may easily find full employment for any amount of leisure and charitable zeal. The Society was founded by young men, and these are earnestly invited to become Active Members, assuring them of the brotherly welcome with which they will be received, and the speedy reward they will win in the gratitude of the poor.

Honorary Members incur no obligation but the contribution of a fixed sum annually or otherwise to the Society's funds, the amount being optional and no minimum fixed; they are entitled to attend all general meetings, retreats, etc., and to participate in the Society's prayers and good works, and they add very much to its strength.

All men are eligible as members provided they are in a position to contribute anything, however

small, to the Society's funds and are so far practising their religion that they may be expected to edify their fellow-members and be edified by them.

There are about 820 Conferences in England, which assemble at a stated time each week, and at which the Brothers meet to join in common prayers and spiritual readings, to promote the visiting and other works in progress, and to promote the objects of the Society. Men desiring to join the Society should communicate in writing with the local president. Where no Conference exists any eligible men may be enrolled as Corresponding Members, and will so participate in the works and benefits of the Society.

Ladies cannot be members, but by subscribing an annual amount, however small, they can be enrolled as "Benefactors," and as such are enabled to obtain special indulgences; and they may be of great assistance to the Society, either individually or in association, by entering into communication with it, undertaking to visit cases more suitable to them, dispensing the Society's relief to such cases, and helping to provide clothing, sick relief, bedding, or employment for the poor, or distributing literature.

The Society is entirely non-political, but is open to co-operate with any charitable societies, whether Catholic or not, for the better care of the poor.

The Rule of the Society was duly submitted to and approved by the Holy See, which in token of

approbation has at various times enriched the work with ample Indulgences, particulars of which will be found in the Rule Books and Cards of the Society.

The present Holy Father, in his letter to the President-General, dated April 5th, 1922, writes : "It has been Our good fortune for many years past to be very closely acquainted with the activities of the Brothers of St. Vincent de Paul, to appreciate their zeal, their devotion to the Holy See, the supernatural spirit which animates their works, and to witness the abundant fruits of their apostolate. . . .

"We ask our Divine Saviour to continue to pour out the abundance of His graces on this institution, which draws from His Charitable Heart the secret of its generous self-sacrifice, to continue to bless your apostolate of charity in the immense needs of the present time. . . ."

By a strange coincidence nearly ninety years ago the first meeting of the St. Vincent de Paul Society was held in London, at Leicester Square—a few steps from St. Patrick's, Soho, where this biographical sketch of Ozanam has been written. By a stranger coincidence still the first president of the Society in England was a member of the Italian Colony in London, Mr. Pagliano, the proprietor of what was then the Sablonière Hotel, in Leicester Square. Now, after the lapse of almost a century, it has fallen to the priest in charge of

the Italian Colony in Soho to tell the tale of that first meeting.

On January 29th, 1844, Mr. Pagliano invited a number of friends and acquaintances to meet in his hotel to discuss the project of founding a Conference of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in London. His interest had been aroused in the work which Ozanam and his fellow-helpers were doing in Paris by a series of articles which had appeared a few weeks earlier in the *Tablet*.

Among those present at this first meeting were Frederick Lucas, the editor of the *Tablet*, and a certain Mr. Wigley. George Wigley was to play a prominent part in the establishment of the Society in England. A Lancashire man, he had studied art in Paris and was personally acquainted with Ozanam. He had met the latter a few years earlier at the Sorbonne, where he had gone to listen to his course of lectures on "The History of Civilization in the Vth Century." Ozanam had invited him to his house and introduced him to Monsieur Bailly.

Mr. Wigley was thus able to give a first-hand account of what was being done in Paris at the meeting held at the Sablonière Hotel, Leicester Square. Those present agreed that "it was advisable that an institution should be formed on the basis of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul established in France, for London and its vicinity."

At a subsequent meeting, held on February 11th, 1844, Mr. Pagliano was elected president of the first Conference established in England. Conferences were formed very shortly afterwards at Warwick Street, Spanish Place and Lincoln's Inn Fields. A Central Board was constituted, and Mr. Pagliano became president of the Board. He was succeeded in 1852 by Mr. George Blount.

Such were the modest and inconspicuous beginnings of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in England. Since then the Society has flourished exceedingly. A detailed account of the work being carried on in England at the present time may be gained from the Annual Report issued by the Superior Council for England, 66 Victoria Street, London, S.W.

Information of a particular nature concerning the work of the St. Vincent de Paul Society in other parts of the world may be obtained on application to the following addresses :

Superior Council for Ireland, 30 South Ann Street, Dublin.

Superior Council for Canada, 76 Chemin Ste. Foy, Quebec.

Superior Council for Australasia, 197 Castlereagh Street, Sydney.

Superior Council for South Africa, 11 Hope Street, Capetown.



FREDERICK OZANAM

The following are the addresses of Superior Councils in other countries :

AUSTRIA . . . . .	Schottenfeldgasse, 75A/12, Vienna.
BELGIUM . . . . .	13, Rue Brialmont, Brussels.
CZECHOSLOVAKIA . . . . .	Mikulandska, 7 Prague
DENMARK . . . . .	Bangersgade 11, Copenhagen.
GERMANY . . . . .	25 Klingelpütz, Cologne.
FRANCE . . . . .	5 Rue du Pré aux Clercs, Paris (vii).
HAMBURG . . . . .	Hamburg 37. Rothenbaumchaussée 207, Germany.
HOLLAND . . . . .	Postbus 396, 's-Gravenhage.
HUNGARY . . . . .	Papua Velde, 7, Budapest.
ITALY . . . . .	Bologna, 33/Via San Giorgio.
" . . . . .	Florence, 9 Via della Stufa.
" . . . . .	Genoa, 12 Vico S. Matteo.
" . . . . .	Milan, 16 Piazza Duomo.
" . . . . .	Modena, 14 Via S. Agostino.
" . . . . .	Naples, 75 Via Gennaro Serra.
" . . . . .	Palermo, Via Ruggero Settimo S.
" . . . . .	Turin, 2 Piazzetta, Madonna delgi Angeli N2.
" . . . . .	Venice, S. Polo, 2033.
LUXEMBOURG . . . . .	Luxembourg, 9 rue des Glacis.
POLAND . . . . .	Cracow, Ve sw' Tomasz 28.
" . . . . .	Posen, Gniezno, 3 Ve Chrobrego.
" . . . . .	Warsaw, Ve Kopernika 33.
PORTUGAL . . . . .	197 Rua des Martyres da Liberdade, Oporto.
ROME . . . . .	Vicolo Nicoloda Folentino No. 20.
SPAIN . . . . .	11 Veronica, Madrid.
SWITZERLAND . . . . .	Bishop's House, Fribourg.
GENEVA . . . . .	9 Corratierie, Geneva.
YUGOSLAVIA . . . . .	Collegium Marianum, Ljubljana. •
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ALGERIA . . . . .	37 rue d' Isly, Alger.
ARGENTINA . . . . .	Alsina, 840 Buenos Ayres.
BRAZIL . . . . .	77 Rua Reachuelo, Rio de Janeiro.
CHILE . . . . .	687 Moneda, Santiago.
COLUMBIA . . . . .	Calle 10, No. 164, Bogota.
EGYPT . . . . .	Place de l'opera 3, Cairo.
MEXICO . . . . .	4A de Donceles, No. 92 Mexico.
URUGUAY . . . . .	Treinta y tres 1286, Montevideo.
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA . . . . .	289 Fourth Avenue, New York City.

It would seem fitting to close this brief summary of the work of the St. Vincent de Paul Society with the words addressed by H.H. Pius X of Blessed Memory to the President-General of the Society during the pilgrimage to Rome in April, 1909 :

“ It may be said of all the saints that, once their mortal career is ended, they still live in the memory of men thanks to the virtues of which they have left an example behind them and by the works or institutions they founded. It is right that we should attribute this honour to St. Vincent de Paul in a marked degree. He still lives on in the Congregation of the revered Priests of the Mission, who were trained in his school ; in the peerless Sisters of Charity, whom he called into existence, without mentioning on this occasion the many other institutions which owe their origin to St. Vincent. Lastly, he is still living in the admirable institution of the Conferences, which, a century and a half after his death, were placed under his patronage, have taken his name and imitate his faith, charity and apostolic spirit : a new generation, an unexpected but fruitful posterity, which has borne wherever planted the choicest fruits of Heaven’s favour.

“ We greet you, beloved sons of the St. Vincent de Paul Conferences, and We thank you for the consolation you afford Our heart, not only by the good wishes you presented to Us on the occasion of Our Sacerdotal Jubilee, but also by the conquests

made through your zeal and the plentiful harvest of your charitable works. The grain of mustard sown in 1833 by Frederick Ozanam has become a gigantic tree which extends its branches over the whole world, and after seventy-six years' existence the Conferences of St. Vincent de Paul are already flourishing in France, Italy, Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, England, in North and South America, Canada and Australia; they even penetrate into Russian Poland and the Belgian Congo; they are becoming the centre around which neophytes of every mission on earth gather.

"We rejoice with you, beloved sons, at this marvellous prosperity, and in order that it may be constantly kept up We advise you to be, above all, men of charity, whose actions are prompted by faith. In your works of benevolence always look for your inspiration to the Altar. If every day you lift up your hands to God in prayer before lowering them to relieve human miseries they will be strengthened to bring back to God those souls who have lost all thoughts of Heaven. Your charity ought not to be that of men, but of Christians who behold in the poor something sacred—not only the image but the very person of Our Lord Jesus Christ. For it is He who says so, when He reminds us in the holy Gospel of the day when He will say to those who will be at His right hand: 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess the Kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the

world. I was hungry and you gave Me to eat ; I was thirsty and you gave Me to drink. I was a traveller and you gave Me hospitality. I was naked and you clothed Me, sick and in prison and you visited Me.'

"Then the just will say : 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, thirsty, a traveller without clothes, sick and in prison ?' And Jesus will answer : 'In truth, I say unto you, whatsoever you did unto the least of My little ones, My brothers, you have done unto Me.'

"Therefore, when you visit and help the poor it is Our Lord Jesus Christ whom you visit and help. No doubt you will sometimes find both physical and moral sufferings in your visits of charity ; you will meet with unfortunate beings poisoned by the worst suggestions of irreligion, miserable slaves to sin, steeped in corruption and vice, self-excommunicated, for whom exist no longer either faith, Church or Sacraments ; but do not be afraid, the holy angels accompany you into those abodes of wretchedness ; and in those poor creatures, no matter how deeply depraved they may be, you will have the consolation of discovering hidden treasures, precious remains of natural goodness and inclinations for virtue, the still visible imprint of the character received in Baptism, traces of religion and faith which will, through your patient charity, afford you not merely the hope, but the certainty of their salvation.

“When Our Lord Jesus Christ told His apostles to preach the Gospel, He also appointed the seventy-two disciples to heal the sick and infirm and to announce to them the coming of the Kingdom of God. The Conferences of the St. Vincent de Paul Society admirably answer this design of Our Divine Redeemer for the conversion of the world. If the duty of the clergy is to teach the truths of religion and to confirm them by marvels of charity, they find, none the less, in the apostleship of the laity a powerful help, preparing the way for them and, by relieving corporal distress, awakening souls to take in the truths of the Gospel.

“In fact, while the spirit of evil instils into the hearts of so many poor people not only distrust but also hatred of priests, hinders them from meeting these messengers of God, and by diabolical means worthy of Satan closes up every approach to men’s souls, the sons of St. Vincent de Paul, animated with the spirit of the Apostles, are well received in poor families into which a priest may penetrate afterwards without let or hindrance. This is how the missions for which the way is paved by the visits to the poor of the sons of St. Vincent de Paul produce in a parish, in a short time, as much good result as the untiring zeal of the parish priest could have obtained at the end of many years—such as the baptism of children and adults, unlawful unions rendered legitimate by the ceremony of religious marriage, the conversions

of heretics and sinners, an increased frequentation of the Sacraments, congregations edified, Christian schools founded. These are indeed, beloved sons, the triumphs of grace which the Lord is pleased to bring about through your labours.

“Indeed, the blessing given by the August Pontiff Pius IX of saintly memory at your first General Meeting, on January 5th, 1855, presided over by Him, in which your pious and peace-loving army received the highest authorized mission, the most solemn sanction, the most authentic consecration, has wrought wonders, the history of which is written in letters of gold in the annals of Christian apostleship. May the Lord deign, through Our blessing confirmed by Him, to perpetuate those wonders. And since there are as yet so few labourers compared with the abundance of the harvest to be reaped, may He be pleased to multiply them, through your zeal, in the mystical field of the Catholic Church. And may you be able, on your return home full of joy at the end of your labours, repeating the words of the seventy-two disciples, ‘Lord, behold now the very demons obey us,’ hear, in your turn, these words of the Divine Master: ‘Do not rejoice because evil spirits obey you, but because your names are inscribed in Heaven—*Gaudete quod nomina vestra scripta sunt in caelis.*’

“In expressing these good wishes to the Cardinal Protector of the Society, to you, beloved President-General, and to all here present, as well as to your

Brothers throughout the whole world, to your families and theirs, and to the poor you visit, We grant from the bottom of Our Heart the Apostolic Benediction."

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE LIGHT OF HIS EXAMPLE

**T**HAT the lamp of charity lit one hundred years ago by Frederick Ozanam still continues to burn brightly is plain enough from the foregoing pages.

Those who have benefited though from the example of Ozanam's life may be divided into two distinct categories. On the one hand are all those members of the St. Vincent de Paul Society who have reaped some spiritual benefit from their work on the different Conferences. A shining example of this is provided by the life story of Pier Giorgio Frassati, to whom reference has already been made.

Apart from these, though, there is another, necessarily much smaller, group of men who have attempted to follow in the footsteps of Ozanam as university professors. In Italy, where the conditions of university life during the past half-century have been very similar to those in France, the example of Ozanam has been followed by three men of the highest intellectual standing,



Guiseppe Toniolo, Contardo Ferrini and Ludovico Necchi.

We have already spoken at some length about Professor Toniolo. Those who wish to know the touching life story of Dr. Necchi—one of the founders of the Catholic University of Milan—should procure the booklet on “Ludovico Necchi,” issued by the Catholic Truth Society. A word remains to be said in conclusion about Contardo Ferrini.

Born in Milan in 1859, Contardo Ferrini was baptized in S. Carlo al Corso, the same church in which Ozanam had been christened half a century earlier. As a student of law at Pavia, during the first years of the reign of King Humbert, he was surrounded by an atmosphere of anti-clericalism not dissimilar to that which Ozanam had encountered in his day at the University of Paris, under the monarchy of Louis Philippe. But the reaction of the Frenchman found an outlet in Catholic social service and that of the Italian took the form of a deepening of the interior life, manifested externally by striking and consistent Christian conduct in ordinary affairs.

Offering at the age of twenty a Latin thesis for his degree, Ferrini passed—again like Ozanam in Paris—with honours exceeding those ever previously granted to any student in the school of law at Pavia. That evening in the Bishop's palace he informed Monsignor (later Cardinal) Riboldi of

his success. Supposing this due partly to the encouragement of Professor Buccellati, Ferrini's uncle, who held the chair of Canon Law at the University, the Bishop of Pavia prudently inquired who had helped him to do so well in his examinations. His answer was a spontaneous and simple gesture. Unbuttoning his jacket, Ferrini showed Monsignor Riboldi a small crucifix suspended from a chain around his neck.

The times were of no small difficulty for the Church, both in Germany, where Ferrini went for a post-graduate course at the University of Berlin, and in Italy during his career as a professor of Roman Law at the Universities of Messina, Modena and Pavia.

In two fields of scientific research Ferrini reaped the highest honours—those of Byzantine and of Roman Penal Law. The historian, Theodore Mommsen, who had known Ferrini since his student days in Berlin, is said to have remarked that, whereas the nineteenth century had been that of Savigny, the twentieth would be called that of Ferrini, and that, moreover, owing to his work the primacy in this branch of learning had passed from Germany to Italy.

Ferrini published nothing in the way of Catholic apologetics during his life time. After his death in 1902 certain papers, which had passed in 1905 into the hands of Pius X, were published in a small volume, "Scritti Religiosi." With the ex-

ception of his "Meditations" and "Rule of Life," these papers were mostly private letters written for the benefit of friends. Many former colleagues expressed surprise on reading them. Knowing him to have been an exemplary Catholic, they did not suspect him of having reached such heights of sanctity. "He was like a closed lamp," explained an intimate friend, "through the chinks of which a privileged few were able occasionally to catch a vivid glimpse of the brightness of the hidden flame."

"Here below," he writes, "we may well rejoice when we catch a glimpse, 'as through a glass in a dark manner,' in the leafy foliage of trees, or in the moonlit waves of the sea, of the beauty of the countenance of God; or when from the white radiance of a saintly soul, or from some touching act of Christian charity, we can deduce, *per speculum et in ænigmate*, something of the warmth and tenderness of His divine heart. What, then, will it be like when we behold Him face to face and contemplate His glory?"

The theodicy of Ferrini is all condensed into this passage, in which he follows the classical scholastic demonstration, from effect to cause, of the existence and attributes of God.

"When I wished to rise up to Him," continues Ferrini, "God taught me to notice every virtuous tendency in those around me, each generous impulse and holy thought, and to magnify them

to an infinite degree. I did so, and was astounded at His majesty, fascinated by His beauty. . . . I drew nigh and exclaimed : ' As the hart panteth after the fountains of water, so my soul panteth after Thee, O God ! ' "

How similar this is to many passages which might be quoted from the writings of Ozanam, who was equally sensitive to the beauties of Nature! The effort to reach out to God is the effort to reach the infinite. Every system of philosophy, Ferrini points out, is the science of the infinite, viewed oft-times upside down, but never denied. Every religion is a natural straining of the soul towards the infinite, countless times frustrated yet never abandoned. Amongst all the various systems of philosophy and divers types of religion, he shows how Christianity alone has revealed the universal capacity to rise up to the infinite.

While the learned Brahmin longed for complete absorption in the divine infinite, to the point of losing his own individuality, those of a lower caste were sunk in a debased polytheism, which darkened their minds to the light of reason and thwarted the natural aspirations of their hearts. So too, in Athens and Rome, while the philosopher contemplated in the splendours of the firmament the majesty of God, the populace flocked to the mysteries of Bacchus, or to worship in the Great Mother from Lydia a shapeless stone as a new diety. Exactly the reverse takes place with

Christianity. Every barrier is broken down. The infinite is made accessible to all. In the palace of the Cæsars a Galilean fisherman reveals the folly of the Cross, while an unknown Jew proclaims on the Areopagus at Athens the Unknown God. To all men the good tidings are announced. In every land incense and praise ascend to God, because He has "revealed to babes and sucklings what He has hidden from the wise and prudent."

For the first steps towards the infinite, Ferrini insists, are those of humility—that virtue which is most easily within the reach of all, and particularly of those whom we hold of least account. The thoughts of the white-haired peasant, gazing upwards into the starlit sky, transcend the celestial spheres; the trembling lips of the aged crone, who barely escapes from the wheels of the "baroccio" carrying its burden of thoughtless worldlings, mumble no curse, her heart harbours no envy—rather perhaps a sublime sense of pity; the prayer of the sightless beggar, to whom a few coppers have been denied, follows the retreating footsteps of the degenerate adolescent, whose eyes are fixed on a thousand obscure objects in turn. To them the world pays no heed. Yet they have understood the meaning and purpose of life, for they have realized the existence of a higher supernatural order, they have reached out towards the infinite which has explained to them the finite. What does the rationalist philosopher, who sows

broadcast seeds of doubt, immorality and despair, know in comparison with them?

Such were the ideas of Ferrini, who has been called a Milanese Ozanam. There exists in fact a striking similarity not only between the careers but likewise between the characters of these two great Catholic laymen. Both were taken away from the scene of this world while still in the prime of life, Ozanam at forty, Ferrini at forty-three years of age. The Cause of the Beatification of both of them has actually been begun in Rome.

On the centenary of the birth of Frederick Ozanam, in 1913, the following prayer, which is recited at the conclusion of every meeting of the different Conferences of the St. Vincent de Paul Society scattered all over the world, was composed by Cardinal Amette.

“O God ho didst fill the hearts of Frederick Ozanam and his companions with the love of the poor, and didst inspire them to found a Society for the relief of the spiritual and corporal necessities of the destitute, deign to bless this work of Apostolic charity, and if it be pleasing to Thee that Thy holy servant Frederick Ozanam should be raised by the Church to the honours of the Altar, vouchsafe, we beseech Thee, to manifest by heavenly favours how pleasing he was in Thy sight. Through Jesus Christ Our Lord. Amen.”

In 1923, with the approval of Cardinal Dubois, Archbishop of Paris, the president of the Central

Council of the St. Vincent de Paul Society sent a circular to the Brothers at the Conferences all over the world asking whether it was their wish that the Cause of Frederick Ozanam be introduced. The answer which came from every quarter of the globe was unanimous, "Yes!" Two years later the necessary preliminary steps were taken by the Curia of the archdiocese of Paris. In 1926 the process of sifting the preliminary evidence before opening his Cause in Rome was likewise begun in Lyons.

## CONCLUSION

**W**E have endeavoured to paint a portrait of Frederick Ozanam against the historical background of the times in which he lived. We began by briefly summarizing the main features of the religious situation in France and Italy in 1800. We cannot do better than conclude by reviewing the position of the Church—say in 1870.

Ozanam, it is true, was born in 1813 and died in 1853. But since it would obviously be impossible to understand his life's work without some slight knowledge of the position of the Church at the opening of the nineteenth century, so too in order to realize the full importance of his career one must take into consideration the astounding changes which were just beginning to appear on the political horizon at the time of his death, and which developed rapidly till they reached a climax about 1870.

The storm of anti-clericalism and unbelief which swept over Europe just before Ozanam was born was gathering force again at the time when he passed away. It was to burst out once more not so very long after his death.



The most spectacular event of this second outburst of anti-clericalism was the entry in 1870 of the troops of Victor Emmanuel into Papal Rome. The Europe which Ozanam had known was gone. A new cycle in European affairs was opening. To find a turning point in European history of equal importance we must pass on beyond the Great War to the Lateran Treaty between Pius XI and Mussolini in 1929, and to the new Corporative States which are being formed under our very eyes at the present moment after the breakdown in one country in Europe after another of the parliamentary system.

Ozanam died young. Had he lived another twenty years, as did most of his contemporaries, he would have lived to see the United Kingdom of Italy, the German Empire and the Third Republic in France. With the *Kulturkampf* waged against the Church by Bismarck within the boundaries of the newly-created German Empire we are not concerned here. In order to be able to view the portrait of Ozanam, though, in its proper historical perspective a word must be said on the growth of anti-clericalism in Italy and France.

The movement in the early nineteenth century for the liberation of Italy from foreign rule was shared by all Italian patriots. As to the form of government best suited for the Italian people opinions were divided from the start. In the early stages of the *Risorgimento* many prominent Italian

writers and statesmen were in favour of a Confederation of the various small kingdoms in the peninsula under the leadership either of the Pope or of the King of Piedmont. Mazzini and his followers, on the other hand, were working for the establishment of an Italian republic. Others again looked forward to the day when, from the Alps to the southernmost point of Sicily, the whole of Italy would be united under one sceptre—that of the House of Savoy. That day arrived, owing to the statesmanship of Cavour, not many years after Ozanam's death.

Most unfortunately the latter stages of the *Risorgimento* were accompanied by a series of oppressive laws against the Church. They first took effect in Piedmont, and were gradually extended to the whole of Italy. Whatever may have been the immediate purpose of the anti-Catholic legislation of those far-distant days, the ultimate result was the de-Christianization, at any rate to a certain extent, of Italian political and social life for a couple of generations.

The first indications of the gathering storm appeared before Ozanam's death. In 1848 the Jesuits were expelled from the dominions of Charles Albert of Savoy—namely, Piedmont and Sardinia. Their property was confiscated. In 1850 the Concordat established between Piedmont and the Holy See in 1841 was destroyed by the Suardi Laws—so called after the name of the Government

official responsible for drawing them up. The Archbishop of Turin, Monsignor Franzoni, very naturally protested. He was arrested and exiled from the kingdom. At Lyons, in France, where he sought refuge, a deputation of French Catholics, at the suggestion of Louis Veuillot, the famous Catholic journalist, presented him with the pectoral cross of the late Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur Affre, who, as has already been said, had been killed a year or two earlier while attempting to bring to an end the fighting in the streets of the capital. "It was only right," so they told Monsignor Franzoni in their address, "that the cross of a martyr should find a resting place on the breast of a confessor of the faith."

After Ozanam's death anti-clerical laws of an even more drastic nature were passed in Italy. Military chaplains in the army and navy were suppressed in 1866. A new law was introduced at the same time by which a religious marriage celebrated in church was no longer legally recognized as valid in the eyes of the State. A civil marriage before the registrar alone had legal value. Three years later students for the priesthood were declared no longer exempt from military service. In 1873, not long after the proclamation of Rome as the capital of the new United Kingdom of Italy, the ancient theological schools were abolished in the State universities.

Something of the interplay of conflicting ethical,

political and social tendencies during the new cycle in modern Italian history which opened not long after Ozanam's death may be realized if we glance at the leading spirits in Italian literature, who exercised the widest influence on the life of the nation. The poetry of Carducci personifies the spirit of 1870—a pagan reaction against Christianity coupled with a sturdy spirit of rebellion against foreign oppression. But the paganism of Carducci could lead only to hedonism. Its logical outcome was the self-centred cult of pleasure, the rebellion against all moral restraints afterwards advocated by D'Annunzio. Perhaps the gentle humanitarianism of Pascoli, with its wistful and longing glances towards the discarded idealism of Christianity, represents a counter-reaction against the morbid pessimism produced by the writings of D'Annunzio. With Fogazzaro we are once more within the gates of Christianity, though of a type as yet unable to cut itself loose from the weakening influence of Modernism. It was left to Papini, in post-war Italy, to lead the way back to the main stream of Catholic religious thought.

In the sphere of Italian internal politics this new cycle was that during which the Liberals held the reins of political power. In the hands of second-rate political wire-pullers, like Depretis and Cairoli, the Government seized on the specious excuse of preventing a return of the Temporal Power of the Pope in order to justify a determined attempt to

de-Christianize the youth of Italy. The ensuing process of social and moral disintegration rendered necessary the intervention of a strong man to avert disaster—Crispi. Discredited later by the untoward results of his colonial policy in Africa, Crispi was superseded by Giolitti, who carried on the Liberal tradition till Italy passed into the melting pot of the Great War. Since then what was deemed well-nigh impossible in the days of Crispi and Leo XIII has been concluded, namely, a pact between Church and State settling in a manner acceptable to both parties the Roman Question—the Lateran Treaty between Pius XI and Mussolini. A new cycle has opened in the history of the relations between Church and State in Italy.

The history of Catholic Action during the new period in Italian history which opened scarcely a decade after Ozanam's death is therefore, plainly enough, the history of a defensive movement which aimed at keeping intact the Catholic heritage of past centuries and at preserving the corner-stones of Christian civilization. In its earliest stages this movement is connected with the name of the veteran Catholic leader, Paganuzzi, President of the Opera dei Congressi. Naturally at that time a satisfactory solution of the Roman Question was the main feature in the Catholic programme. During the pontificate of Leo XIII, owing to the rapid growth of anti-clerical Socialism, especially in the north of Italy, a second problem was added to the

first—that of discovering a satisfactory solution of the growing conflict between Capital and Labour. Paganuzzi was receding into the background. His position as the central figure of Catholic lay action was soon to be taken by Giuseppe Toniolo. At the opening of the twentieth century a third tendency began to be noticeable in the programme of Italian Catholic action—the effort to create a nucleus of Catholic writers and men of learning with a view to developing Catholic Higher Culture. This culminated in the creation soon after the Great War of the Catholic University of Milan.

In the history of the relations between Church and State in France too a new era was to open soon after Ozanam passed away. When he died the political experiment of the Second Empire of Napoleon III had scarcely begun. In 1870 the Third Republic was proclaimed. A storm of unbelief which had been gathering force during the latter years of the reign of Napoleon III was to burst out soon after. The signal for the attack was given by the politician Gambetta with his famous catchword, "*Le clericalisme, c'est l'ennemi.*"

There is no need to enter into details concerning the anti-Christian legislation passed by the French Chamber during the Third Republic, which eventually culminated at the opening of the twentieth century in the expulsion from French soil of the religious orders and a complete rupture between

Church and State. It is enough to point out that the process of the de-Christianization of the French nation was carried out very largely by means of first de-Christianizing the Government schools. The same tactics were employed—with a greater measure of success—as in Italy, where, apart from other considerations, private schools run by members of the religious orders were never entirely suppressed.

To be properly understood the life of Ozanam must thus be placed in its proper setting. He lived during a comparative lull between two storms of anti-Christian feeling which swept over Europe. His influence as a university professor and as a writer was a most powerful one for good, particularly in France after the havoc wrought by the French Revolution. Since his death his influence has been greater. His position as an historian is recognized by all. Although his writings may not now be widely read, the fundamental ideas contained in them have been developed by all those engaged in the historical defence of Christian civilization against the destructive criticism of Rationalism. The fine example of his career as a university professor has been a source of inspiration to many Catholic men of learning holding teaching positions in continental universities. As the founder of the St. Vincent de Paul Society his influence has been even wider still. For where the force of reasoning and of argument would have

been of no avail he and his followers, the Brothers of the St. Vincent de Paul Society, have been able to lead innumerable souls back to God by the simple exercise of Christian charity.

That Ozanam should have used his pen to good purpose to defend the foundations of Christian civilization is very natural when we remember the times in which he lived.

His life was passed during an interval between two violent storms of irreligion which burst out in France and swept over Catholic Europe. The first, which spent its force just before he was born, was owing to the writings of Voltaire and Rousseau, of the self-styled "philosophers" of the eighteenth century, D'Alembert, Diderot, La Metterie, Holbach and the other contributors to the famous "Encyclopedia" published in 1751-72. The second was being prepared during his lifetime by a fresh group of anti-clerical writers. Had Ozanam lived, as did most of his contemporaries, to the end of the Second Empire, he would have seen the full development of this new phase of incredulity which was to exercise so powerful an influence after 1870 on the builders of the Third Republic.

There is this fundamental difference, though, between these two phases of unbelief. Whereas the former was simply directed against the Church and the Christian religion, the latter went deeper and aimed at uprooting from the minds of men the very idea of the existence of God. The



opponents of the Church were no longer deists, but atheists.

The enemies of God were at work during Ozanam's lifetime. They were responsible for the open attack on religion which broke out soon after the proclamation of the Third Republic and which increased in violence towards the end of the century.

One of the most conspicuous of these was the founder of Positivism, Auguste Comte, whose influence increased to an astounding degree after his death in 1857. It is not too much to say that the majority of French free-thinkers between 1850 and 1880 called themselves Positivists. Comte admits that civilization has benefited in the past from the influence of Christianity. He would even preserve something of the external structure of the Catholic Church. He would put man, though, in the place of God as the central pivot of religion. Thanking God, as he expressed it, "for His provisional services in the past," he would usher in the new religion of Humanity.

Another contemporary of Ozanam whose writings were to have a remarkable influence after 1870 was the Socialist Proudhon, the author of the two famous slogans, "Property is theft" and "God is evil." The same may be said of Renan, whose famous "Life of Jesus" was published exactly ten years after Ozanam's death. Amongst anti-Catholic historians holding university positions in Paris during Ozanam's lifetime may be mentioned

Quinet and Michelet. The latter, in particular, was never tired of casting discredit on the Christian civilization of the Middle Ages.

Against this background the vindication of Christian civilization which Ozanam undertook stands out in bolder relief and acquires a deeper meaning.

The irreligious spirit of the French bourgeoisie which Ozanam lamented in his own day is to be ascribed to the influence of Voltaire. "I know no greater enemy, though, of Voltaire," he writes, "than the bare facts of history. It is only to be expected, therefore, that his descendants to-day should feel afraid of the testimony of those past centuries which they are continually caricaturing. . . . Let us remove from the statues of our ancestors in the faith the thick layers of dust under which they have purposely been buried. When these splendid figures of the past are allowed once more to shine in all their true glory, then, we may be sure, people will pay them due honour." Concentrating his attention on the Christian civilization of the early Middle Ages, Ozanam, as we have seen, thus made it his business to prove to the world of his day the value of the services which have been rendered to society by the Church.

The defence of the dogmas of the Catholic religion, he felt, should be left to the theologians. The laity, none the less, could do useful work by proving what a benefit the logical results of those

dogmas have been in practice to mankind and to civilization.

Ozanam was not alone in drawing the attention of Frenchmen to the Middle Ages and to Christianity as a source of artistic inspiration. This tendency he had in common with most of the writers who belonged to the Romantic Movement in French literature in the early nineteenth century. The herald of this movement was Chateaubriand, who, as has already been mentioned, published his "*Génie du Christianisme*" in 1802, the year in which the Concordat was signed between Napoleon and Pius VII. To define exactly what is meant by Romanticism in Literature is a well-nigh impossible task. It is easier to point out what it is not, and to show how it was a reaction against the previous tendency to look for sources of artistic inspiration solely in Classical Antiquity. "Who will deliver us from the Greeks and the Romans?" was the battle cry of the new school.

The glamour of the Middle Ages, which appealed so strongly to the imagination of the Romanticists, naturally paved the way for a closer scrutiny of this neglected period of European history. First came the poets and the novelists with their moonlit scenes of armoured knights riding through lonely wooded glens. It became fashionable to admire Gothic architecture, which had been considered a generation earlier beneath contempt. Then came the historical scholars, who penetrated deeper

beneath the surface and rediscovered the Middle Ages. During Ozanam's lifetime Augustin Thierry published his "*Récits des Temps Mérovingiens*," and Guizot lectured on the Medieval History of France at the Sorbonne.

The originality of Ozanam lies in his having made use of the history of the Middle Ages as a weapon of Catholic apologetics. In this field he is more or less of a pioneer, and for that very reason perhaps his name as an historian is better known than are his writings. He pointed the way to a path along which many Catholic scholars of note have travelled since.

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

- 1802—Concordat between Pius VII and Napoleon.
- 1813—Frederick Ozanam born in Milan.
- 1814—Fall of Napoleon.
- 1815—Napoleon escapes from Elba: Battle of Waterloo.
- 1816—Ozanam family settle down in Lyons.
- 1824—Charles X becomes King of France: Leopold II Grand duke of Tuscany.
- 1830—Abdication of Charles X: Louis Philippe King of the French.  
Ozanam enters solicitor's office in Lyons.
- 1831—Charles Albert becomes King of Savoy.  
Ozanam in Paris as student at Sorbonne.
- 1833—St. Vincent de Paul Society founded.  
Ozanam visits Italy with his parents.
- 1835—Lacordaire's first sermon in Notre-Dame.
- 1836—Ozanam a Doctor of Law.
- 1837—Death of Ozanam's father.
- 1837—Queen Victoria succeeds to throne of England.
- 1839—Ozanam a Doctor of Literature.  
Death of Ozanam's mother.
- 1840—Ozanam obtains lectureship at Sorbonne.
- 1841—Marriage of Ozanam.  
Second visit to Italy.

# CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE

- 1845—Birth of Ozanam's daughter.
- 1846—Pius IX elected Pope.  
Third visit to Italy.
- 1848—Abdication of Louis Philippe, King of the French. Heroic death of Archbishop of Paris, Monseigneur Affre.
- 1849—Abdication of Charles Albert: Victor Emanuel King of Savoy.
- 1852—Second Empire in France.  
Last lecture of Ozanam at Sorbonne.
- 1853—Ozanam in Tuscany: death of Ozanam at Marseilles.
- 1859—France and Savoy at war with Austria. Convention of Villafranca. Lombardy annexed to Savoy. Abdication of Leopold II, Grand duke of Tuscany. Parma, Modena and Tuscany annexed to Savoy.
- 1860—Expedition of Garibaldi and his Thousand to Sicily. Kingdom of Naples annexed to Savoy.
- 1870—Franco-Prussian War. Entry of troops of Victor Emanuel II into Rome. Third Republic in France.

